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# STARBURST

DECEMBER 2016

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# EDITORIAL

Welcome to STARBURST Issue 431!

Although I have slightly more *mixed* feelings about **STAR WARS: Episode VII - The Force Awakens**, I am genuinely pleased to see the franchise back firmly in the public zeitgeist. There is an appetite for more. A mainstream appetite more than happy to queue up and cough up to see literally anything with the brand attached to it. With such demand in play, things can go either way. **Rogue One: A STAR WARS Story** has an incredible amount of scrutiny to endure, and being the first of the Disney spin-off anthology movies, it needs to cement the wider **STAR WARS** universe in a similar manner to the novels and comic books.

It is certainly an exciting moment in the **STAR WARS** mythology in which to set this instalment. The lead up to the original movie, and the story of the 'heist' of the Death Star plans allows us to revisit the original era that we all remember so fondly. Walkers, classic Stormtroopers, the original Death Star, and a certain Sith Lord are all in play. The cast are equally excellent, and the effects in the trailers look top notch (nice to see AT-AT Walkers catching some sun before being dropped off on Hoth). Will it be as good as it looks? Well, we can't answer that one just yet, but we are more than happy to share with you a nice preview, and have a look at some other characters that we think ought to be appearing in their own **STAR WARS** flick.

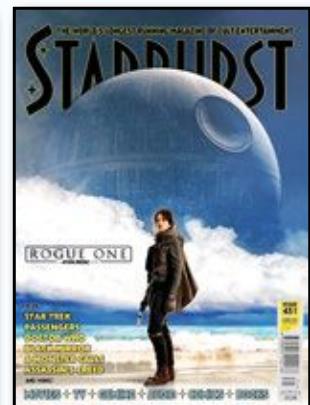
We also have a look forward to the latest video game to be upgraded to a Hollywood experience. **Assassins Creed** starring Michael Fassbender might well be the perfect property for this treatment, and might fare better than some other 'doomed' transitions. I have always liked the mythology of these games, ever since Leonardo da Vinci turned up in the second one, and took on the role of 'Q', arming the main character Ezio with all manner of retro weaponry. The visual look of the games, and the characters are also very cinematic, and **STARBURST** is more than happy to help get you in touch with your inner Animus...

We also look ahead to the return of **Doctor Who**, take a quick trip to **La La Land** (it's a film, we've not gone bonkers!), and also manage to fit in all of the usual regular **STARBURST** columns (except **It's Only A Movie**, which will be back with the 'Brozzer' next month). This issue is a 'Force' to be reckoned with. [Readers: \*groan\*]



Until next time,  
keep watching the weird and wonderful,

Jordan Royce



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# FEEDBACK

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or email: [letters@starburstmagazine.com](mailto:letters@starburstmagazine.com)

## STAR

### BLEUGHH WITCH

I have been a STARBURST reader since the early 80s, my first issue featured QUEST FOR FIRE on the cover, which makes it 1981 I think, when I was 15. My dedication to our genre has had its ups and downs, much like STARBURST itself. Like other readers who have written in recently, my interest has had a new lease of life in recent years and I have been buying STARBURST much more frequently. I want to congratulate you on Issue 430. It is strong enough to remind me of why I loved the magazine in the '80s. The cover picture of the Universal Monsters sold it to me straight away. Like Jordan says in his editorial, my interest in the genre was also sparked by those BBC double bills.

On that note, I was delighted to see our local art house cinema (The Dukes in Lancaster) is showing six of the Universal Monster movies in double bills over three weekends this month. FRANKENSTEIN and BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN being the program for this coming Saturday, the latter being one of my all-time favourite movies.

The rest of the issue is no slouch either. Sad that you got so much slack for the review of BLEUGHH WITCH when it seemed dead accurate to me. Same goes for remarks about the massively overrated original.

Michael Berryman sounds a great chap. I never did get round to replacing my VHS copy of THE HILLS HAVE EYES so have not seen it for years. Also, my wife has spent years trying to divert me from watching the more gruesome end of the horror spectrum so I'd have to either hide it or do this 'streaming' thing I hear the youngsters talking about...

**COCKNEYS VS ZOMBIES**  
I've never seen. If the locals are anything like those miserable buggers in EastEnders, I'd probably end up on the side of the Zombies anyway, though your article does make me tempted to watch it. I suspect

I'm more of a STRIPPERS VS WEREWOLVES man, though. I suspect Livvy Boote would not approve.

Having said that, I do find Livvy's articles very thought provoking and actually agree with pretty much everything she writes. A few issues back, she wrote about her female genre icons and, despite being an old bloke, I share her views almost exactly. We are currently working our way through BUFFY again from the start and it still amazes me how brilliant the female characters are, with the portrayal of Willow and Tara's relationship, especially, being just lovely. I thought of Livvy's article again yesterday when watching CROUCHING TIGER, HIDDEN DRAGON. All the main characters are very strong women and would fit well into Livvy's list.

One thing that does frustrate me, and it is not the fault of STARBURST, is reading reviews of movies that sound right up my street then finding that NONE of the 5 cinemas within sensible distance are showing them. I ended up buying IT FOLLOWS on disc as I really wanted to see it (the best John Carpenter film not made by John Carpenter). Same goes for THE SHALLOWS this summer - no local screenings so I will end up watching it on a small screen. This had mixed reviews I know, but I'd still rather watch it THAN BRIDGET JONES'S SODDING SPROG, which was shown everywhere for weeks on end.

Darren, LANCASTER

Ooh we're such a tease! It's very annoying when the local cinemas only show the very mainstream films. Even if they had them on for only 1 week it would be a nice bit of variety. I guess it's just too much money, if they feel certain films won't be as popular. It's especially a shame as seen as a DVD would be evidence for wife to find, so the only way for you to see grousome films is to sneak out to the cinema!

## LETTER

### ESOTERIC

Like Jordan Royce, I didn't enjoy the 1999 version of THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT. I felt it didn't live up to the hype, was overrated and you could hardly hear/see what was going on. Advocates of the film at the time accused me of lacking imagination or not liking the low budget, but I had enjoyed other films of that ilk, i.e. THE LAST BROADCAST. I just felt THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT was style over substance - and not much style at that.

On other issues, I like that you have a dedicated STAR TREK section in the magazine now. What's missing? Nothing, really, but maybe, if space permits, a dedicated news section devoted to STAR WARS. I confess, I often fall behind with STAR WARS news and am intrigued by what comics, books or merchandise may be out there right now.

On a final note, you should add the word 'esoteric' to your tagline. How about 'The World's Longest Running Magazine Of Esoteric And Cult Entertainment'? You continue to surprise me. DRAC PACK? Never heard of it. Given 30% of my bookshelf is devoted to obscure and esoteric TV shows/films, you continue to surprise me. Thanks!

Stephen Parry  
via EMAIL

That's a cool idea Stephen, you never know what might show up next in the magazine, but in the meantime keep your eyes peeled in THINGS TO COME, and the different news and reviews pages, as STAR WARS does crop up all over the place.

### THE BLAIR GLITCH PROJECT

Hey! The review of BLAIR WITCH in STARBURST #430 was hilarious. Being into experimental music/Japanoise à la Merzbow (check YouTube but be prepared) I actually enjoyed the soundtrack; the glitches (THE BLAIR GLITCH PROJECT, hehe), noise, sudden blasts. I agree that the original THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT (1999) was an overhyped movie. An Internet hype probably can convince people a badly recorded fart sounds like a symphony. Sometimes I enjoy watching bad movies. THE ROOM (2003), directed by and starring Tommy Wiseau (compared to him, Jean-Claude Van Damme and Arnold Schwarzenegger sound like Shakespearean thespians), is a good example. Maybe Wiseau should try his hand at another (the horror! the horror!) BLAIR WITCH movie. "How's your sex life, Blair Witch?"

Say hello to Jack Bottomley for me. I love his puns. Keep it up (no pun intended)! All the best for 2017! I look forward to read more about mainstream movies, obscure horror, and independent filmmaking. May the force be with you, live long and prosper and stay out of trouble.

RoboKapreles (1978), BELGIUM

**How can you say such a thing about your fellow countryman JCVD!** The only reason they aren't Shakespearean thespians is because ol' Bill ain't around no more. But I think he would have loved to cast them... and not just because you would be able to see them (and their big muscles) right from the back of the theatre!



Winner: Mark Fletcher. Head over to [www.starburstmagazine.com](http://www.starburstmagazine.com) to enter this month's caption contest.

# TRAILBLAZER

BY KIERON MOORE

**"WE DON'T GOTTA LET OURSELVES BE LESSENED BY DEATH  
OR ANY OTHER DAMN THING. WE CAN MAKE OUR LIVES THE  
WAY WE WANT THEM — OR WE AIN'T WORTH NOTHING."**

JESSE CUSTER, PREACHER #66

The comic book artist Steve Dillon sadly passed away on October 22nd at the tragically early age of 54. A much-loved figure in the world of comics, he contributed to some of the most popular series of the past few decades and helped create many iconic characters that will resonate for much time to come.

Raised in Luton, Bedfordshire, Dillon discovered his love of creating comics at an early age, producing an adaptation of *Escape from the Planet of the Apes* for a school publication at fourteen. Remarkably, his first professional work came just two years later; the sixteen-year-old Dillon attracted the attention of Dez Skinn, who recruited him to draw the title strip in the first issue of *Hulk Weekly*.

This led to a regular gig drawing *Nick Fury* in the same magazine, as well as work on several of Marvel UK's popular titles; throughout the '80s, Dillon was a regular artist on *2000 AD*, *Warrior*, and *Doctor Who Weekly*. For *2000 AD*, he became one of the most popular Judge Dredd artists. For *Doctor Who Weekly*, he created Abslom Daak, the chainsaw-wielding 'Dalek Killer' who recently returned to Titan's *Who* comics, and illustrated the final strip to star Peter



Davison's Fifth Doctor. The British comics scene of the 1980s would have been very different without Steve Dillon.

At the end of the decade, he started branching into new territory. In 1988, he launched *Deadline* with Brett Ewins, a counterculture magazine with a mixture of original strips and prose articles, covering both comics and alternative music. Reflecting Dillon and Ewins' frustrations with *2000 AD*'s lack of creator rights, one of the aims of *Deadline* was to launch new writers and artists, including Jamie Hewlett, Nick Abadzis, and D'Israeli, who continue to mould the comics scene to this day.

And in 1989, Dillon began to break into American comics. His first US-published work was DC's *Skreemer*, a futuristic miniseries based on *Finnegan's Wake*, written by Peter Milligan and illustrated by Dillon and Ewins. Work on DC's *Animal Man* followed, with Tom Veitch writing, but the work of Dillon's that had the biggest impact was alongside Irish writer Garth Ennis. Ennis and Dillon had worked on a *Judge Dredd* strip together years previously, and in 1992 they began the first of their resoundingly beloved collaborations – their run on *Hellblazer*.

Following the occult detective John Constantine, who lives in a grotesque and grimy world of angels and demons, *Hellblazer* went from strength to strength under Dillon and Ennis. Their run, from 1992 to 1994, dug deep into Constantine as a character while exploring themes of race and religion. This religious angle would come to the fore in their next collaboration, the work that perhaps represents the height of Dillon's career.

Launching in 1995, *Preacher* was the original creation of Garth Ennis and Steve Dillon. It follows small-town Texas preacher

Jesse Custer, who is accidentally possessed by Genesis, the offspring of an angel and a demon, which destroys his church and wipes out his congregation. Determined to literally find God and get to the bottom of all this, Custer travels across the US, accompanied by his ex-girlfriend Tulip O'Hare and foul-mouthed Irish vampire Cassidy. Custer, Tulip, and Cassidy, as well as other memorable characters such as the Saint of Killers, Herr Starr, and the fantastically named Arseface, were all designed by Dillon's pencil. The series ran for 66 issues, finishing in 2000; over this period, it built up a solid cult following and won the Best Continuing Series award at the 1999 Eisners, as well as Favourite Comics Artist for Dillon at the 2000 Eagles, among other awards.

In 2000, Dillon and Ennis moved to Marvel, where they revitalised the damaged Vietnam vet Frank Castle for their take on *The Punisher*. The series' popularity had recently declined, no thanks to Marvel's odd decision to kill the character and have him become some sort of vengeful supernatural entity. Ennis and Dillon wisely ignored this and returned the character to his vigilante roots, beginning with the infamous story arc *Welcome Back, Frank*. This period was characterised by gritty crime drama, black humour, and Dillon's grounded redesign of the character, replacing the spandex-style white gloves with a leather trench coat.

Though this run ended in 2003, Dillon drew Frank Castle several more times throughout the rest of his career, alongside Ennis as well as other writers. In fact, he began a new *Punisher* run with writer Becky Cloonan this May, with his last work on it yet to be published. The 2000s and 2010s also saw him draw for a number of other Marvel titles, covering iconic characters from Wolverine and

Bullseye to the Thunderbolts.

Dillon preferred telling a good story to indulgent bombast, which is evident in both his choice of writers to work with and his art style, with his keen narrative sense allowing him to maximise every scene's effect while never overcomplicating things. His stories are known for their blend of horrific violence and black humour, and he had an expert ability to bring out both the shocks and the laughs through the way he put a page together. His characters came out of the page and into our imaginations through his expert handling of emotion and pathos.

The outstanding body of work Dillon produced has had an enormous impact not just on comics but also on other media. His interpretation of Frank Castle inspired both the 2004 film starring Thomas Jane and the take on the character featured in Netflix's *Daredevil*; in fact, one pivotal scene in which Jon Bernthal's Punisher confronts Daredevil on a rooftop was taken straight from Dillon's artwork. This incarnation of the character will soon return in his own series. *Preacher*, meanwhile, also appeared on TV screens this year, with Dillon credited as an executive producer; a second season is on the way.

Steve Dillon was beloved amongst the comics community, not only as the talented creator of many legendary characters, but as a sociable, easygoing, and dependable friend to many. STARBURST sends our condolences to his friends and family; he is survived by three sons and two grandchildren, as well as his parents, brother, and sister. He will be sorely missed.

## STEVE DILLON 1962 – 2016



# THINGS TO COME

A ROUND-UP OF THE  
BEST (AND WORST)  
OF THIS MONTH'S  
MOVIE / TV NEWS



## MARVEL

Where Marvel-based movies are concerned, the biggest news this month surrounds 20th Century Fox's *Deadpool 2*. In a surprising move, director Tim Miller has departed the project due to creative differences. What was most shocking about this is that Miller, star Ryan Reynolds, and writers Rhett Reese and Paul Wernick had spent nearly a decade working together in getting *Deadpool* to the big screen in the first place. The four seemed to be a solid creative unit, and so Miller leaving the upcoming sequel has caught many off-guard. Additionally, composer Junkie XL, real name Tom Holkenborg, wasted no time in following Miller out of the door. As well as *Deadpool*, Junkie XL has recently worked on the likes of *Mad Max: Fury Road* and *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice*. When it comes to replacing Tim Miller, the current favourite appears to be *John Wick*'s David Leitch. Other names believed to be in the frame are *Cabin in the Woods*' Drew Goddard and *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.*'s Magnus Martens. For us? We'd hand the gig to the ever-awesome Canadian duo of Jen and Sylvia Soska. The original plan for *Deadpool 2* was to start shooting early next year, although that now obviously depends on how quickly a new director can be found. Given that this year's rip-roaring *Deadpool* took home \$782 million from just a \$58 million budget, 20th Century Fox is clearly keen to get a sequel moving along sooner rather than later. As well as Ryan Reynolds returning as the titular Merc with a Mouth, *Deadpool 2* will also feature fan-favourite comic book characters Cable and Domino. Where Cable is concerned, *Avatar*'s Stephen Lang has been petitioning for the gig, whilst the current names in the frame for badass mutant merc Domino are believed to be *Scott Pilgrim vs. The World*'s Mary Elizabeth Winstead, *Halt and Catch Fire*'s Mackenzie Davis, *Cloverfield*'s Lizzy Caplan, *Star Trek Beyond*'s Sofia Boutella, *SPECTRE*'s Stephanie Sigman, *G.I. Joe: The Rise of Cobra*'s Sienna Miller, and Sylvia Hoeks, who's most recently been signed up for *Blade Runner 2049*.

Sticking with Fox's Marvel movies, following last month's rumours that Sienna Novikov was playing X-23 in *Logan*, now comes confirmation that it's actually Dafne Keen who's playing the young

female clone of Hugh Jackman's Wolverine in what will be the last outing as Wolverine for Jackman. Also on board for the film are Sir Patrick Stewart as Professor X, Stephen Merchant as Caliban, Boyd Holbrook as the villainous Donald Pierce, Richard E. Grant as the no-good Dr. Zander Rice, and unknown roles for the likes of Elizabeth Rodriguez, Eric La Salle and Elise Neal. From the first mesmerising trailer for *Logan*, it looks as if Jackman's ninth and final outing as Wolverine could be something truly special. *The Wolverine*'s James Mangold is directing, with *Logan* hitting screens on March 3rd, 2017.

Over in the Marvel Cinematic Universe, *Black Panther* has brought in three new additions for Ryan Coogler's movie. Joining Chadwick Boseman's titular T'Challa will be Forest Whitaker, Daniel Kaluuya, and Florence Kasumba; *The Last King of Scotland*'s Whitaker (who actually worked with Coogler on *Fruitvale Station*) will play Zuri, an elder statesmen of Wakanda; *Sicario*'s Kaluuya will be playing W'Kabi, a confidant of Boseman's Black Panther; and Kasumba will be back as Ayo, a member of the Dora Milaje and a role she played earlier this year in *Captain America: Civil War*. The first solo movie for Boseman's King of Wakanda is currently set for a February 16th, 2018 release.

Elsewhere in the MCU, Evangeline Lilly has revealed that Hope van Dyne/The Wasp will be a part of the fourth *Avengers* movie. The currently untitled May 2019 movie will follow on from Anthony and Joe Russo's *Avengers: Infinity War*. The Russos will be shooting the fourth *Avengers* effort back-to-back with their *Infinity War*, which itself will hit the big screen in May 2018. Lilly's van Dyne will suit up and take on the Wasp mantle in *Ant-Man and the Wasp*, set for July 6th, 2018. As for other heroes present for the upcoming outings for Earth's Mightiest Heroes, Tom Holland has confirmed that a deal is currently in the mix for his Spider-Man to pop up in future *Avengers* movies. Holland's Wall-crawler has the threat of Michael Keaton's Vulture to deal with first when *Spider-Man: Homecoming* is released next July.

In Marvel's Netflix-exclusive shows, there's been a whole bunch of news surrounding *Marvel's The Punisher* and *Marvel's The Defenders*. First up, the Jon Bernthal-starring *The Punisher* has brought in *11.22.63*'s Daniel Webber as Lewis Walcott, a young veteran who has had a difficult time readjusting to society; *A Lonely Place for Dying*'s Jason R. Moore is Curtis Hoyle, a pal of Bernthal's Frank Castle who's one of the few who knows that Frank is still alive; *Nurse Jackie*'s Paul Schulze is Rawlins, a top-ranking member of the CIA; *Bates Motel*'s Jaime Ray Newman is Sarah Lieberman, Micro's wife; and *The Wolf of Wall Street*'s Michael Nathanson is Sam Stein, a Homeland agent. These new additions join a cast that includes the aforementioned Bernthal as Frank Castle/The Punisher, Ben Barnes as Billy Russo, Ebon Moss-Bachrach as Micro and Amber Rose Revah as Dinah Madani. Additionally, Deborah Ann Woll's Karen Page, previously seen in *Marvel's Daredevil*, will have a role in *The Punisher*. The series is expected to land on Netflix next year.

As for *Marvel's The Defenders*, this month brings confirmed returns for Elden Henson's Foggy Nelson (as seen in *Daredevil*), Eka Darville's Malcolm (as seen in *Jessica Jones*), Carrie-Anne Moss' Jeri Hogarth (as seen in *Jessica Jones*), Rachael Taylor's Trish Walker (as seen in *Jessica Jones*), Scott Glenn's Stick (as seen in *Daredevil*), Rosario Dawson's Claire Temple (seen wherever she pleases), and Jessica Henwick's Colleen Wing (to be seen in next year's *Marvel's Iron Fist*). These names join Charlie Cox's Daredevil, Krysten Ritter's Jessica Jones, Mike Colter's Luke Cage, Finn Jones' Iron Fist, Simone Missick's Misty Knight, Deborah Ann Woll's Karen Page and seemingly Jon Bernthal's Punisher in taking down a threat headed up by Sigourney Weaver's mysterious villain. *Marvel's The Defenders* is an eight-part mini-series that will hit Netflix at a TBC 2017 date.<sup>AP</sup>



## DC

And just like that, he's gone... in a flash! No, we're not talking about Ezra Miller's Barry Allen - instead it's Rick Famuyiwa who's the one doing the running here. It was only back in April that the *Dope* director was tasked with helming Warner Brothers' *The Flash*, but he's now departed the project due to the ever-familiar 'creative differences'. What makes this even more worrying for Warners and their DC Extended Universe is that Famuyiwa is the second director to walk out on the project for this very reason, with him having taken over following Seth-Grahame Smith's departure earlier this year. The plan was to start shooting on *The Flash* next spring ahead of a 2018 release, although it remains to be seen if the movie's search for yet another director will cause any delays in the production. Regardless, Miller's Scarlet Speedster will next be seen in Zack Snyder's *Justice League* when that speeds to the big screen in November 2017.

In other DCEU news, Joe Manganiello has revealed that *The Batman* will start shooting in the first half of 2017, although there's still nothing official on just when the first solo outing for Ben Affleck's Dark Knight will hit the silver screen. Manganiello, of course, was cast as master assassin Slade Wilson/Deathstroke, the 'big bad' of the film, earlier this month. As well as Affleck and Manganiello, the movie will also feature J. K. Simmons as Jim Gordon and the returning Jeremy Irons as Alfred Pennyworth. In addition to starring in the film, Affleck will be directing *The Batman* from a screenplay that he's currently working on with DC's iconic Geoff Johns. Much like Ezra Miller's Flash, Affleck's World's Greatest Detective is another who will be present in Zack Snyder's *Justice League* late next year.

Holy casting news, Batman! Sticking with Gotham City's sworn protector, genre legend William Shatner has been cast as Harvey Dent! No, not in the DCEU, but rather in the sequel to this year's animated *Batman: Return of the Caped Crusaders*. Set in the realm of the classic Adam West-starring 1960s TV series, *Return of the Caped Crusaders* saw West voicing Batman alongside Burt Ward as Robin and Julie Newmar as Catwoman. In addition to these staples of many a generation, Jeff Bergman took over from Cesar Romero as the Joker, Wally Wingert took over from Frank Gorshin as the Riddler, and William Salyers took over from Burgess Meredith as the Penguin. And now, in their next animated outing, West and Ward's Dynamic Duo will have to tackle Shatner's Duke of Duplicity, Two-Face. The Harvey Dent/Two-Face character never actually appeared in the '60s series, but Harlan Ellison once penned an episode to feature this longstanding Bat-villain. In more recent times, Dent has had a part to play in the *Batman '66* comic book range. Currently awaiting a title

The latest from director Gore Verbinski (who helmed the American remake of *The Ring* as well as the first three *Pirates of the Caribbean* movies) is a return to horror following the rather lacklustre performance of *The Lone Ranger*. The official synopsis reads: "An ambitious young executive is sent to retrieve his company's CEO from an idyllic but mysterious 'wellness centre' at a remote location in the Swiss Alps. He soon suspects that the spa's miraculous treatments are not what they seem. When he begins to unravel its terrifying secrets, his sanity is tested, as he finds himself diagnosed with the same curious illness that keeps all the guests here longing for the cure."

**A Cure for Wellness** opens in the US on February 17th but the UK will have to wait until March 24th, 2017.

and a release date, the sequel to *Batman: Return of the Caped Crusaders* will arrive at some point in 2017.

Taking the action down to TV land, and The CW's *Arrow* has cast a pretty major DC character, as they've confirmed *Continuum* and V's Lexa Doig will turn up later in the show's fifth season as none other than Talia al Ghul. Described as 'worldly and cultured, and an elite warrior who doesn't pick sides but rather creates her own,' Talia is confirmed to debut in the tenth episode of the current season, with the character then appearing in multiple episodes. We've previously seen a young Talia during one of DC's *Legends of Tomorrow*'s timey-wimey adventures, but now we'll be getting a 'proper' version of the daughter of Ra's al Ghul. Of course, Ra's, as played by the excellent Matt Nable, was the 'big bad' of *Arrow*'s third season, and he also popped up in the aforementioned *Legends*. *Arrow* has additionally featured Katrina Law as Nyssa al Ghul many times over the past few years.

In the only other snippet of small screen DC news this month, FOX has moved to order a full second season of *Lucifer*. Currently available on Amazon Prime in the UK, the second year of the show was due for thirteen episodes but the network has now ordered an additional nine episodes of the Tom Ellis-starrer, pushing Season Two up to a full twenty-two-episode affair. AP



# horrorchannel

**A round-up of what not to miss this month on Horror Channel...**

**NOVEMBER 23RD - HORROR EXPRESS** (1972)

A truly marvellous movie starring stalwarts of terror Peter Cushing and Christopher Lee. There's a defrosted creature on the loose aboard the Trans-Siberian Express, and the bodies begin mounting up. Although not made by any of the big name studios of the day, it's a glorious flick packed with shocks as well as good-natured humour. Don't miss it.

+++

**NOVEMBER 26TH - BLOOD RAGE** (1987)

Typical American slasher has Mark Soper (**Graveyard Shift** II) in a dual role as murderous twins. Full of gory kills, it was originally shot in 1983, back at the height of the success of the likes of **Friday the 13th**. Also stars Louise Lasser, but keep an eye open for Ted (brother of Sam) Raimi selling condoms!

+++

**NOVEMBER 29TH - SHARKZILLA** (2002)

Clearly a very serious warning about oil issues, as a deep sea drilling platform sets free a prehistoric shark to wreak havoc with the workers. Originally known as **Megalodon** (the proper name for the massive shark seen here), it was renamed in the UK to the much snappier title we have today. Stars the late Robin Sachs (Ethan Rayne in **Buffy**), Mark Sheppard (**Supernatural**) and a load of dodgy CGI. Perfect afternoon viewing, then.

+++

**NOVEMBER 30TH - THE HILLS HAVE EYES** (1977)

If you read the interview with Michael Berryman, the star of this legendary movie, last issue (if not, why not? Order a back issue now on [starburstmagazine.com](http://starburstmagazine.com), we'll wait...) you will have discovered all manner of interesting facts about this Wes Craven classic, meaning you will enjoy the film all the more. It's one of those films that has gotten better with age.

+++

**DECEMBER 5TH - THE EVIL OF FRANKENSTEIN** (1964)

The third of the Hammer Frankenstein movies sees the creature finally adopt the famous flat head appearance (thanks to a distribution deal with Universal), but the make-up and almost everything else here is a tad subpar. Still, worth watching for the ever-brilliant Peter Cushing and cinematographer Freddie Francis' direction.

+++

When it comes to the TV series screening this month, they don't get bigger (or meaner... or greener...) than the brilliant '70s classic **The Incredible Hulk**. Catch Bill Bixby and Lou Ferrigno as both sides of Dr David Banner's personality from the very beginning on November 29th.

**Horror Channel is available on SKY 319, Virgin 149, Freeview 70, Freesat 138 and TalkTalk 487.**

## SUSPIRIA

Whilst there's certainly plenty of trepidation over the upcoming remake of Dario Argento's legendary **Suspiria**, the redo has moved to bring in a familiar face from Argento's original 1977 movie.

It's being reported that Jessica Harper has signed on for the retelling of this fan favourite film. In the original, Harper played Susie Bannon. Where Amazon Studios' remake is concerned, it's not been revealed at this stage what role she'll be playing, but she joins a cast that includes Dakota Johnson, Tilda Swinton, Chloë Grace Moretz, and Mia Goth. Argento's '77 effort is a classic that ranks as one of the very best horrors of all time amongst many fans and critics. A thrilling murder mystery affair, the plot centres on an American dancer arriving in Germany just as bodies pile up and witches emerge from the shadows.

Luca Guadagnino is on directing duties for this new take on **Suspiria**, although original helmer Argento has already gone on record to voice his disapproval at one of his most beloved movies being remade.

The **Suspiria** remake will arrive at a TBC 2017 date. AP



## ALIEN: COVENANT

With Ridley Scott's **Alien: Covenant** currently in post-production, star Michael Fassbender has revealed that he's actually playing two roles in the film.

Fassbender, who played android David in Scott's **Prometheus**, explained, "I am allowed to say I am playing two robots – Walter and David. I think what's great about it is that Ridley has gone back to the original DNA of *Alien*, the horror element of that. But it also has the scope and scale of *Prometheus*. Ridley has cut it already. He is a machine. He is an incredible human being and he was in such good form. He is such an imaginative and mischievous figure."

Fassbender is joined in **Alien: Covenant** by Katherine Waterston, Danny McBride, Billy Crudup, Demián Bichir, Jussie Smollett, Amy Seimetz, Carmen Ejogo, Callie Hernandez, and the returning Noomi Rapace as Elizabeth Shaw.

The official word on the film reads: 'Set as the second chapter in a prequel trilogy that began with **Prometheus**, **Alien: Covenant** connects directly to Ridley Scott's 1979 seminal work of science fiction. It begins with the colony ship *Covenant*, bound for a remote planet on the far side of the galaxy. There, the crew discovers what they think is an uncharted paradise, but is actually a dark, dangerous world – whose sole inhabitant is the "synthetic" David, survivor of the doomed *Prometheus* expedition.'

At present, **Alien: Covenant** is set for an August 4th, 2017 release. AP

## AND FINALLY...

The follow-up to Doug Liman's 2014 **Edge of Tomorrow** will actually be both a sequel and a prequel.

Liman, who will be returning to helm this new movie, explained "That is the only sequel that I'm considering doing. It's because, first of all, the story is so amazing – much better than the original film, and I loved and loved the original film – and second of all, it's a sequel that's a prequel. It's going to revolutionise how people make sequels. It really will." Don't hold your breath for it just yet, as it's expected to go into production in late 2017.

+++

Columbia Pictures are rebooting cult alien bug vs military flick **Starship Troopers**, with Mark Swift and Damian Shannon, a pair best known for penning the likes of **Freddy vs. Jason** and the **Friday the 13th** remake, already on board to write the film's screenplay. The new version will pull more from Robert A. Heinlein's 1959 novel than Paul Verhoeven's cult favourite 1997 effort.

+++

Arnold Schwarzenegger and Jackie Chan have been added to **Viy-2**, the sequel to the hugely successful 2014 Russian fantasy film **Viy (Forbidden Empire)**, which was very loosely based on the 1835 novella by Nikolai Gogol, already filmed much more faithfully in 1967. The pair join Jason Flemyng, Rutger Hauer, and Charles Dance in the star-studded affair, which is currently in post-production and expected to be released sometime in 2017.

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# ARE YOU READY TO GO ROGUE?

BY IAN WHITE



ROGUE ONE  
A STAR WARS STORY

PREVIEW





## **WILL THE LATEST STAR WARS EPIC BE ANOTHER CHRISTMAS CRACKER OR ARE DISNEY'S NEW HEROES JUST REBELS WITHOUT A CAUSE?**

Last December, Disney gave the world an early Christmas present when - contrary to naysayer's expectations - *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* performed the ultimate Jedi mind-trick and made George Lucas's nightmarish prequels nothing but a distant memory. Or, arguably, the world gave Disney an early Christmas present when *The Force Awakens* became the highest grossing film of the year and, very nearly, the highest grossing movie of all time. *Avatar* and *Titanic* are still slightly ahead when it comes to box office, but *The Force Awakens* is so close that James Cameron must be feeling the heat from Kylo Ren's lightsaber bristling the hairs on the back of his neck.

But will the highly anticipated *Star Wars* spin-off *Rogue One* make this two memorable Christmases in a row for *Star Wars* fans and the accountants at the House of Mouse, or will the franchise's first big-screen standalone crash and burn

faster than a speeder bike taking a dodgy left-turn through the forest of Endor?

It's definitely going to be an interesting litmus test for Disney, who have come in for some not-unfair criticism from certain quarters because of the ultra-commercial (some might say, money grabbing) way they've exploited the *Star Wars* universe ever since George Lucas sold them the moisture farm back in 2012. In fact, many old-school fans have expressed concerns that, by embarking on a series of spin-off adventures, Disney might be diluting the brand and running the risk that audiences will quickly get sick from *Star Wars* over-saturation. Is that a legitimate fear? With *Rogue One* ready for launch and *Star Wars Episode VIII* slated for 2017 release, we don't have long to find out.

But what do we know about *Rogue One*? Despite the release of a couple of tantalising trailers – with a third trailer rumoured to be on its way even as we write this – the details are still frustratingly vague: set between *Star Wars: Revenge of The Sith* (aka bad Anakin takes a lava bath) and *Star Wars: A New Hope* (aka the movie that old-timers

who watched it back in 1977 still like to lovingly refer to as just *Star Wars*), *Rogue One* follows a band of Rebel Alliance soldiers as they attempt to steal the plans to the planet-obliterating Death Star, a not-so-secret super weapon that is being developed by the evil Empire and its favourite heavy-breathing poster boy, Darth Vader (who - you'll probably be pleased to know - isn't being played by Hayden Christensen, an actor whose career was last seen disappearing down the gullet of a sarlacc).

The rebels are led by Cassian Andor (Diego Luna), a captain and intelligence officer whose 'ability to keep a cool head under fire and complete his mission with minimal resources' probably has a lot to do with K-2SO, his seven-foot-tall droid sidekick who used to work for the bad guys until Andor reprogrammed him to serve the Alliance. K-2SO is described as 'the antithesis of C-3PO with a little bit of Chewbacca's personality in a droid's body', which suggests he doesn't speak Bocce but will pull your arms off if you don't let him win. And, while we're on the subject of droids, the Imperials apparently have a black-plated astromech droid that





looks exactly like an evil R2-D2. What's next? Will Darth Vader have his own evil BB-8? Maybe Quentin Tarantino could make the next *Star Wars* spin-off, 'The Hateful BB-8'? The possibilities boggle our minds, but let's get back to the topic.

It sounds as if Andor's biggest problem is going to be keeping Jyn Erso (Felicity Jones) in check. Following in (or, in the timeline of the *Star Wars* universe, preceding) the girl-power footsteps of Rey from *The Force Awakens*, Jyn is impetuous and defiant with a difficult past, and it's heavily hinted that she might not exactly be a team player. How much of Jyn's troubled history might be due to her 'distant father' Galen (Mads Mikkelsen)? Only time will tell, but since it's on the first page of the 'Writing for *Star Wars*' handbook that at least one character in every story has to suffer some kind of parental abandonment issue, we'd guess that Galen might at least be partially responsible for Jyn's cranky attitude – somebody call Jeremy Kyle (the talk-show host whose surname is already almost *Star Wars* worthy) because the Rebel Alliance obviously needs him. We can't wait for Jyn to say "Sorry Mon Mothma,

*I can't smuggle out the Death Star plans because I'm on the Kylo Jez show in half an hour*" but our instincts tell us we'll be waiting a long time.

Although *Rogue One*'s director Gareth Edwards has already indicated that this new movie will be a Jedi-free zone (at last year's *Star Wars* Celebration in California, he said "*The absence of the Jedi is omnipresent [but *Rogue One*] comes down to a group of individuals that don't have magical powers but have to bring some hope to the galaxy*"), the recent trailer slyly suggests that Chirrut Îmwe (Donnie Yen), a blind rebel who demolishes a troop of Stormtroopers with his quarterstaff, might have more than a touch of latent Ben Kenobi about him. Îmwe apparently believes in the interconnectedness of the Force and has rigorously honed his body through intense physical and mental discipline. We all love an enigmatic warrior, and it's already obvious that Chirrut Îmwe's fight scenes are going to be spectacular, but we're hoping this isn't where *Rogue One* dips into 'Crouching Tiger, Hidden Stereotype' territory. We're already guessing that Rutger Hauer will be playing this part in the inevitable no-

budget straight-to-video knock-off, and that *The Walking Dead*'s Morgan (no slouch with a quarterstaff himself) is probably already in talks with his lawyers.

Baze Malbus (Jiang Wen) is Chirrut's best friend, a freelance assassin who is described in various character breakdowns as 'pragmatic' and 'a crack shot with a heavy repeater cannon'. Let's face it, you've got to be tough when your first name sounds just like the green stuff on the surface of a pool table.

And continuing the tradition that everyone has to have a silly name in that galaxy far, far away, Bodhi Rook (Riz Ahmed) is a former Imperial pilot who has now switched to the Rebel team, which isn't a million light years away from Finn's backstory in *The Force Awakens*. Does this 'bodhi' well for the rest of our heroes? Will the puns never cease? Who knows and definitely not, in that order.

Finally, fans of *Star Wars: The Clone Wars* will already be acquainted with Saw Gerrera, a resistance fighter who is one of the legends of the Rebel Alliance. In *Rogue One*, Gerrera looks





substantially different to his animated counterpart – he's portrayed by Forest Whitaker who, after his run-in with Sil in 1995's *Species*, hopefully still remembers a thing or two about extraterrestrial combat (although we doubt any of his Imperial foes will do quite so much damage to the erogenous zones).

So that's a very brief overview of the rebels – what about the Imperials? Well, we've already mentioned the return of Lord Vader (who will be voiced, as usual, by the silky smooth bass of James Earl Jones), but the Empire's other chief bad guy seems to be Director Orson Krennic (Ben Mendelsohn) who's in charge of Advanced Weapons Research for the Imperial Military, and laser-focused on completing the new Death Star project. If he doesn't succeed, he'll have both the Dark Lord of the Sith and the Emperor to answer to, so we hope for his sake that he's wearing his waterproof lucky underpants and knows how to run away from a force-choke. On the plus side, he's also cruel and cunning and allegedly has a glare more fearsome than a really peed-off angry bird.

As for the rest of the cast, we can expect

to welcome back at least one other familiar face – Jimmy Smits, reprising his role as Bail Organa – and at least one other familiar character, the formidable Mon Mothma herself, portrayed in this younger incarnation by Genevieve O'Reilly, who first played Mothma in *Star Wars: Episode III - Revenge of the Sith* but unfortunately saw all her scenes end up on the cutting room floor. There is even a rumour that Warwick Davis will be somewhere on-screen (could Wicket the Ewok swoop in to save the day? We can but dream...) and Rian Johnson, director of next year's *Star Wars: Episode VIII*, apparently has a cameo as a Death Star technician.

So who can't we expect to see? Quashing some early rumours that were spreading amongst the *Star Wars* fan community, Edwards has said that Han Solo will definitely not be in the movie, which is probably a smart move considering how Harrison Ford's death in *The Force Awakens* left so many viewers traumatised and blubbing hysterically into their popcorn (we know this happened because we were one of them). It would have been a tremendous gamble to introduce Alden Ehrenreich's younger

version of Solo in *Rogue One*, and would almost certainly have pulled focus from all the other new characters.

And what about Princess Leia? Considering how *Rogue One* is the direct precursor to *Star Wars: A New Hope*, and that *A New Hope* begins with Princess Leia's capture after she secretes the stolen Death Star plans inside R2-D2, it would seem a serious omission not to include her character in the new movie. Will she appear in a cameo alongside her adoptive father Bail Organa? The so-loud-it's-deafening radio silence from Disney HQ seems to suggest not, which is a tremendous disappointment. Considering how Leia was pretty much sidelined throughout most of *The Force Awakens*, it makes you wonder if the Mouse House is deliberately trying to keep the princess in the shadows. Or maybe Mickey & co. have bigger plans in store for the royal rebel, because ever since Disney bought the franchise there's been speculation about a possible Princess Leia standalone. Whatever, we're keeping our fingers crossed that Leia will at least appear at the end of the story to tell everyone "Thanks for stealing the plans, guys."





*"Now I can smuggle them the rest of the way and if anyone stops us I'll tell them I'm a member of the Imperial senate on a diplomatic mission – how hard can it be?"* which, in our humble opinion, would make a pretty neat segue into the action of *A New Hope*.

Finally, what about the question on everyone's lips (or, at least, ours)? Are we going to see or hear anything from Grand Moff Tarkin, so elegantly played by Hammer icon Peter Cushing in *Star Wars: A New Hope*? A young Tarkin, played by Australian actor Wayne Pygram, briefly appeared at the end of *Revenge of the Sith*, but there's an intriguing rumour that special effects geniuses have been hard at work combing 'through hours and hours of old footage from the horror movies' to bring Peter Cushing's Tarkin back to the big screen in 'one of the most complex and costly CGI recreations ever'. Cushing sadly died in 1994, and because he found Tarkin's leather riding boots too painful to wear on set he was only ever filmed above the ankles, which means that, in order for the CGI Tarkin to move realistically, the animators have had to borrow Peter Cushing's legs and feet from other movies. It all sounds too weird

and wonderful to be true, but if anyone has the resources to pull it off, it's going to be Disney and the boffins at Lucasfilm's Industrial Light & Magic. We hope they get it right. After all, nobody wants to be responsible for muffing the Moff.

But the biggest question is, can *Rogue One* reach the giddy heights of *The Force Awakens*? We're not going to make any early predictions, but it's unlikely. As several critics have already noted, the filmmaker's decision to step outside the familiar cast of characters and focus on an almost entirely new subset of heroes and villains is fraught with danger, but Gareth Edwards is no slouch when it comes to blockbuster movies (we enjoyed his 2014 take on *Godzilla*) and – if the trailers are anything to go by – it looks like *Rogue One* is going to be a visually spectacular ride. The faithfulness of the production design to the original films has already got us excited. In fact, our only big concern (apart from the absence of John Williams as composer) is whether Chris Weitz and Tony Gilroy can pull off the screenplay – Gilroy's done some terrific work in the past but he took a painful nose-dive when he wrote and directed 2012's *The Bourne Legacy*, and

Weitz – whose credits include *About A Boy* (2002), last year's *Cinderella*, and taking writing and directing duties on the critically panned *The Golden Compass* (2007) – doesn't exactly fill us full of confidence that he'll be able to find his way around the *Star Wars* universe. It doesn't help that so many of *Rogue One*'s new characters already sound like half-baked re-treads of characters we've met many other times before. But, on the plus side, if Edwards and his team have got the mix right, it could also inject the series with some exciting new potential and set the stage nicely for more spin-off adventures, especially the one everyone's either looking forward to or squeezing their eyes tight-shut hoping it will all go away – the Han Solo story.

Still, whatever its critical reception, one thing is for sure: *Rogue One* will have the box office tills ringing louder than sleigh bells this Christmas, and a rodent in a studio not so far, far away will be Ho-Ho-Ho-ing all the way to the bank.



*ROGUE ONE: A STAR WARS STORY* opens in the UK and US on December 16th.





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# TELLING STORIES...

**BY JACK BOTTOMLEY**

**WITH THE FIRST OF THE STANDALONE SPIN-OFF FILMS HITTING SCREENS, AND A HAN SOLO MOVIE TO LOOK FORWARD TO, WE ASK WHAT OTHER STAR WARS CHARACTERS DESERVE THE BIG SCREEN TREATMENT...**

**R**ogue One: A Star Wars Story is - excluding 2008's *The Clone Wars* - the first cinematic *Star Wars* feature to step outside the episodic franchise structure. And with a currently untitled Han Solo film set for 2018, as well as the likes of Samuel L. Jackson (Mace Windu) and Ian McDiarmid (Darth Sidious) open to returning to their characters and Ewan McGregor saying he'd love to do an Obi-Wan Kenobi film (or two), it won't be the last. The move to make the Expanded Universe (EU) non-canon in 2014, some say, has limited many characters' futures, but has it? After all, the new series of *Star Wars Rebels* is using infamous EU character Grand Admiral Thrawn, so clearly these many stories are still possible for use in future projects. So, we ask which *Star Wars* characters deserve their own slice of the solo (pun intended) action? Though, so as not to draw angry letters, we will say this list only includes characters from the live-action movies and yes, we know as well as you that the chances of most of these (some tongue-in-cheek) choices getting their own movies are approximately 3,720 to 1. But to paraphrase a particularly famous scruffy lookin' nerfherder "Never tell us the odds."

A future Boba Fett film is surely a certainty, with numerous Fett film projects hitting headlines well before Disney's 2012 Lucasfilm purchase. Boba Fett has become a cultural icon since he practically stole audience's intrigue in a couple of minutes' screen time in *The Empire Strikes Back*. Since that point, the Expanded Universe has been full of Fett, from him clashing with Vader in John Wagner's *Enemy of the Empire* (1999) to escaping the dreaded Sarlacc pit (in *Tales From Jabba's Palace* anthology story *A Barve Like That: The Tale of Boba Fett*) that brought his cinematic legacy to a controversial end with a gulp and a belch in *Return of the Jedi*. Since then, he has received an official backstory, which saw Fett revealed as an unaltered clone in *Attack of the Clones*. However, fans yearn to see Fett back in his armour, disintegrating targets and leaving his actions to do the talking.



**BOBA FETT**



**YODA**

900 years... imagine all that Jedi Master Yoda has seen and done; it surely can't all have been Youngling lessons and meditations. Yoda is a prime candidate for leading his own film. His early days leading the Jedi Council and the possible conflicts (the 'fallen Jedi', the Lost Twenty and teaching of a younger Count Dooku) could tell illuminating stories. Thirty-six years since his introduction in *The Empire Strikes Back*, the back-to-front talking, two-foot tall, wise, green Jedi has become one of the franchise's most beloved characters, so we can safely say that seen the last of him, we have not.

Boba may be the obvious choice, but his dad Jango certainly has the same potential for a cracking film outing. Check out the underrated video game *Star Wars: Bounty Hunter* and you will see that there is an exciting narrative to be crafted from the Mandalorian. In fact, the video game, or elements of it, would make a great inspiration for a feature, with links to what we would see in *Attack of the Clones*, explanation as to how Fett acquired the iconic Slave I ship, and the formation of his on-off partnership with Clawdite bounty hunter Zam Wesell. Jango's backstory has been left rather unshaded by the canon slate being wiped clean and there is an open field to what stories one of the galaxy's greatest Bounty Hunters could tell.





### DARTH MAUL

Darth Vader was awesome, but what about Sidious' other Sith apprentice, who gave a whole new meaning to lightsaber combat in *The Phantom Menace*? *The Clone Wars* TV series has blessed audiences with some superb Maul stories (Season 5's Mandalore arc in particular) but cinematically, he remains an underused enigma. Built up as the next big bad of the prequels, his quick departure in the climax of *The Phantom Menace* took the wind out of people's sail barge a bit. The horned, tattooed, bad-toothed (Dathomir is not known for dental hygiene) and supremely athletic red-and-black-skinned Sith apprentice is a marvellous creation; with the mountains of material and an impressive fan film that has used the character, we can only imagine the possibilities of a Maul-led movie, covering his training and ascension as Darth Sidious' (temporary) chosen one.

### GENERAL GRIEVOUS

The lightsaber-swinging, coughing cyborg leader of the Separatist droid forces was a supporting villain in *Revenge of the Sith*, but the character's previous backstory makes for quite a tragic tale. Originally, Grievous was a warrior named Qymaen jai Sheelal, who led his fellow Kaleesh warriors in battle against the invading Huk race. However, Count Dooku orchestrated a shuttle crash that would lead to him being re-built as a cyborg and named the separatist leader. His official backstory is now so vague that all this could pretty much become canon. Grievous' story is one of national pride, a fallen warrior, a living being swallowed up by rage and technological malice (a common SW theme); his rivalry with the Jedi (who sided against his race) would be another compelling story that expanded the character's pretty hazy motivations in *Revenge of the Sith* and across *The Clone Wars*.

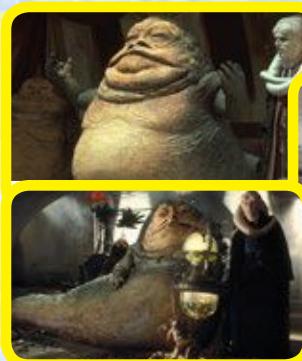


### MAX REBO BAND

OK, the chances of this actually happening are about the same as Alderaan's chances of winning the galaxy's 'safest place to live' award, but let's have some fun. Jabba's cabaret band, seen in *Return of the Jedi*, originally consisted of Droopy McCool, Sy Snootles and the big blue Orlolan himself Max Rebo... The 1997 re-master added a fair few more members including, Greeata and Joh Yowza. Imagine *This is Spinal Tap* meets *Star Wars*, which tells the story of how this band went from touring the wretched hives of scum and villainy to being confined to Jabba's palace when Max signed a lifetime contract for 'all you can eat' perks (see John Gregory Betancourt's 1996 *Tales From Jabba's Palace* story, *And the Band Played On: The Band's Tale*).

### JABBA THE HUTT

We all love a good gangster movie. So, we ask; why not bring the Hutts back to the big screen? Jabba the Hutt is not exactly easy on the eye, but neither was Donald Trump and look what happened there, so why can't Jabba have his own film? Dirty family politics, bounty hunter hits, uneasy negotiations, corruption, there are all the elements here for a pretty enjoyable *Godfather*-with-alien mash-up. Hell, why not bring in one of the many EU yarns about the Hutt clan's hierarchical power battles, such as Jabba's bad romance with Gardulla (seen briefly in *The Phantom Menace*). A Hutt-centred film could also flesh out all those interesting background characters surrounding Jabba on-screen.



### AURRA SING

Assassin Aurra Sing's cinematic legacy consists of watching the Boonta Eve Classic in one blink-and-you miss it moment in *The Phantom Menace* and yet her character has become one of the most written about in the EU. *The Clone Wars* series linked her to assisting a young Boba Fett in his revenge mission against Mace Windu and the odd senator assassination plot but that aside, her character now remains an open book. And in this day and age of increasingly excellent female anti-heroes, what would be more appealing than a *Star Wars* story led by a female assassin (who, in Dark Horse Comics' 2001 series *The Hunt For Aurra Sing*, wielded a lightsaber and was revealed as Force-sensitive). We'd sing its praises!



# TABLETOP EMPIRES

BY ED FORTUNE

## STARBURST takes a look at the new wave of STARWARS gaming...

**I**t's hard to deny that *Star Wars* has changed. Back in the '90s, the franchise was marred by what could only be described as a free for all, with the quality of the movies and the spin-off products being somewhat suspect. With the Disney-led revival of the much loved space fantasy series, however, there has been a marked rise in quality. These days, *Star Wars* stuff is really good. And the table-top games are nothing short of amazing. Let's break it down and take a look at some of the more notable games that you want to add to your Christmas Wish List.



We may as well start with the **Star Wars X-Wing Miniature Battles**. We've mentioned this cracking little space game more than a few times in the past, but it just seems to get better and better. The space battles, after all, are the thing that put the war in *Star Wars*. This a game played with little model spaceships, a bunch of dice and a flat table.

The basic set for the game (which comes in *New Hope* and *Force Awakens* versions) includes three spaceships: one X-wing and two TIE fighters. This is the perfect ratio for any thrilling space combat, with the tough yet limited X-wing holding its own against the speedy yet fragile TIEs. The game has cards that let you modify and improve the ships, so you can fit Luke Skywalker or Poe Dameron into that X-wing for better effect. The game is enormously popular in part due to its flexibility. There are an awful lot of ships available and every conceivable version of a TIE fighter up for grabs, including the one from the cartoon series *Star Wars Rebels* -y'know, the one with the colourful paint-job. It has overtaken **Warhammer** as the most popular tournament miniatures game and yes, it is the game where you can have Boba Fett's Slave I take down the Millennium Falcon.

Its more epic, slightly weird cousin has to be **Star Wars Armada**. This is another



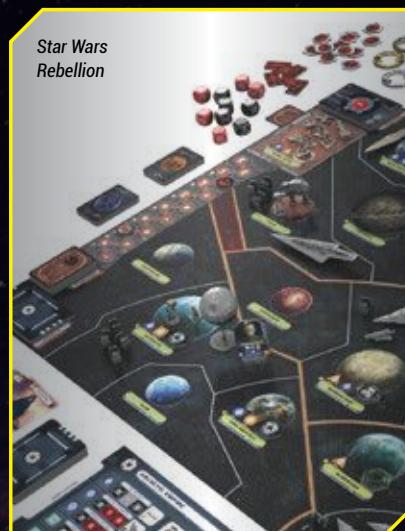
ship to ship combat game, but this time with Star Destroyers rather than X-wings. You can get fighter models for *Armada*, but they are tiny little things. This is the game of planet-destroyer mega-ships smacking into each other with vast arrays of turbolasers. It's a more strategic, considered game than its little brother and more rewarding in terms of planning and thinking.



Sticking with models for a moment, there's also **Star Wars: Imperial Assault**. It's a modular dungeon crawl game, or to put it another way, **Hero Quest** with Jedi. Each player grabs a character and each character has its own model. Players work together as Rebels to explore Imperial outposts or the palaces of dodgy alien gangsters. One player, however, gets to control the Imperial forces. They get to throw piles of stormtroopers, AT-STs and even Boba Fett at the players. It's a campaign-style game that is fun and simple to get into. There's also a set of rules for skirmishes, in case you really want to see what happens if a bunch of stormtroopers line up against a barn door. They miss. A lot.



If you want a spot of immersive gaming action, but you'd rather ditch the models, there's always roleplaying. Star Wars has enjoyed a few table-top RPGs in the past, but the recent versions really capture the feel of the movies. This is mostly due to pretty simple mechanics that all mesh together to make the gaming experience immersive. The new game comes in three 'flavours', though the rules are pretty much the same. Broadly speaking, those variants: Scum, Rebels, and Jedi. We recommend that you take a look at **The Force Awakens Beginner Game**; it's a really neat intro that takes some pre-generated characters scavenging in the wastes of Jakku. It's a great way to get younger players into tabletop gaming, and a handy way of reminding older types what fun looks like.



Speaking of fun, **Star Wars Rebellion** is another take on a two-player strategy game. It's played on an enormous map of the Star Wars galaxy, with all the planets from the classic movies clearly marked out. The pieces are stormtroopers, land speeders and even Death Stars.

One side takes up the role of the Rebels, the others the Empire. For the Rebels, the aim of the game is to destabilise the Empire enough that revolution starts. You do this by blowing up bad guy bases, rescuing princesses from Darth Vader and so on. The Empire wins when it finds and crushes the Rebel base. Each side has a set of strategies open to them. The Empire expands; the Rebels do clever and heroic things. The more the Empire grows, the harder it becomes to watch every planet for signs of Rebellion. It's a great game that captures the feel of the movies very well, and feels like the quintessential Star Wars board game.

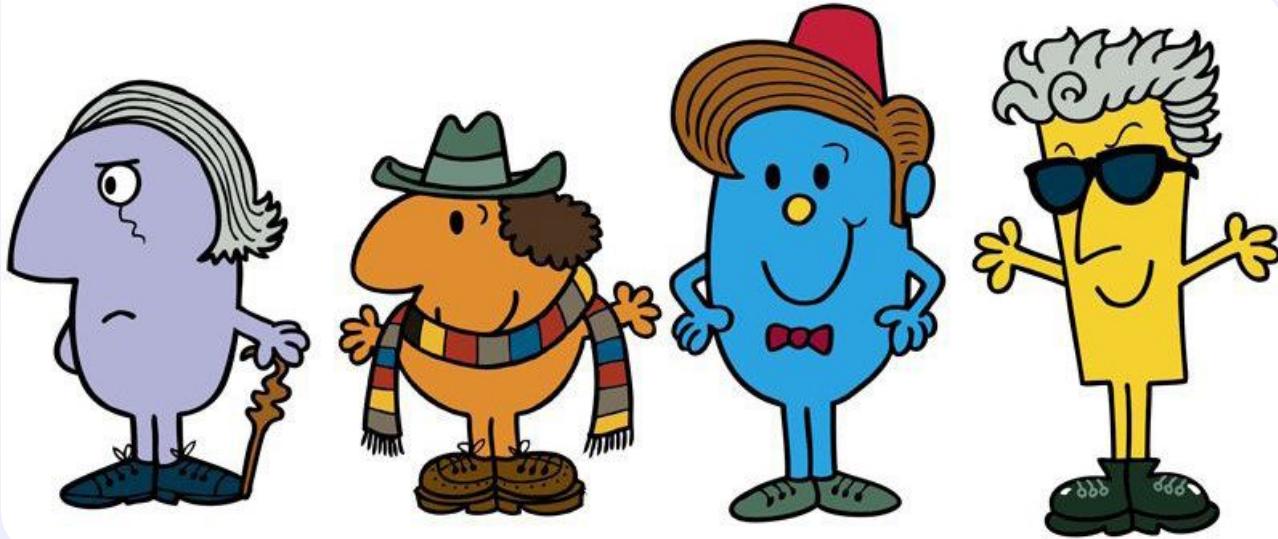
Next up is **Star Wars: Empire vs. Rebellion**, a fun little high speed card game that lets you replay scenes from the movie, or remix them. Want to see what happens if Yoda took on Boba Fett in Bespin? You may get the answer with this, or at least you'll have fun finding out.

Finally, there's the exciting new game on the block. **Star Wars Destiny** is a dice and card game that combines that fun of random chance with deck building strategy. It comes in classic and new movie flavours, which means you can have Poe Dameron fight the Emperor, if that's your thing. You pit characters from the movies against each other, using skills and equipment to carry the day. The dice are unique to each character, and it looks like it's going to be a fun, fast and engaging game.



# OUTSIDE THE BOX

ALL THE NEWS  
FROM THE WORLDS  
OF DOCTOR WHO  
WITH KIERON MOORE



## DOCTOR WHO meets MR MEN

**Doctor Who** has an uneven history with crossovers. *Dimensions in Time*, the Children in Need story in which classic Doctors met *EastEnders* characters, tends to be brushed under the carpet, as does that comic strip where the Eleventh Doctor teamed up with Jean-Luc Picard. But maybe this latest one will be the classic we've all been waiting for – a range of books in which the Doctor crosses into the **Mr Men** world has been announced!

The first four such books – *Dr. First*, *Dr. Fourth*, *Dr. Eleventh*, and *Dr. Twelfth* – plant their respective Doctors into the distinctive world created by Roger Hargreaves, and are written and illustrated by Hargreaves' son Adam. Because the pre-school target market of **Mr Men** love William Hartnell, right? Coming from Puffin Books, these first four stories will be released in Spring 2017, with more expected to follow.

## Classic Writer Joins Series Ten Team

Speaking at New York Comic Con, current **Doctor Who** showrunner Steven Moffat announced that Series Ten will include an episode by a screenwriter who previously wrote for the classic series. This will be the first time a classic series writer has contributed to the new series; one director, Graeme Harper, has worked on both.

Though the identity of the writer has not yet been confirmed, many rumours suggest it's Rona Munro, who wrote the Seventh Doctor's final story *Survival*. Munro would be a great addition to the roster, particularly for fans eager for **Who** to bring aboard more female writers. Return to Outside the Box next month to find out just how inaccurate this rumour is.

Series Ten, which will air next spring and will see Peter Capaldi's Doctor team up with Pearl Mackie's Bill, is still going before cameras; at time of writing, it's believed the production team are working on Episodes 5 and 9.

## Jon Pertwee Honoured by DWAS

The **Doctor Who** Appreciation Society has honoured Third Doctor actor Jon Pertwee with a TARDIS-blue plaque at London's New

Wimbledon Theatre, the venue at which 1989's **Doctor Who** play *The Ultimate Adventure* was launched. At a ceremony held on Sunday October 23rd, Colin Baker, the Society's Honorary President, read tributes, including one from Peter Capaldi, who called Pertwee 'a hero forever'. Baker then introduced Pertwee's widow Ingeborg and daughter Dariel, who unveiled the plaque.

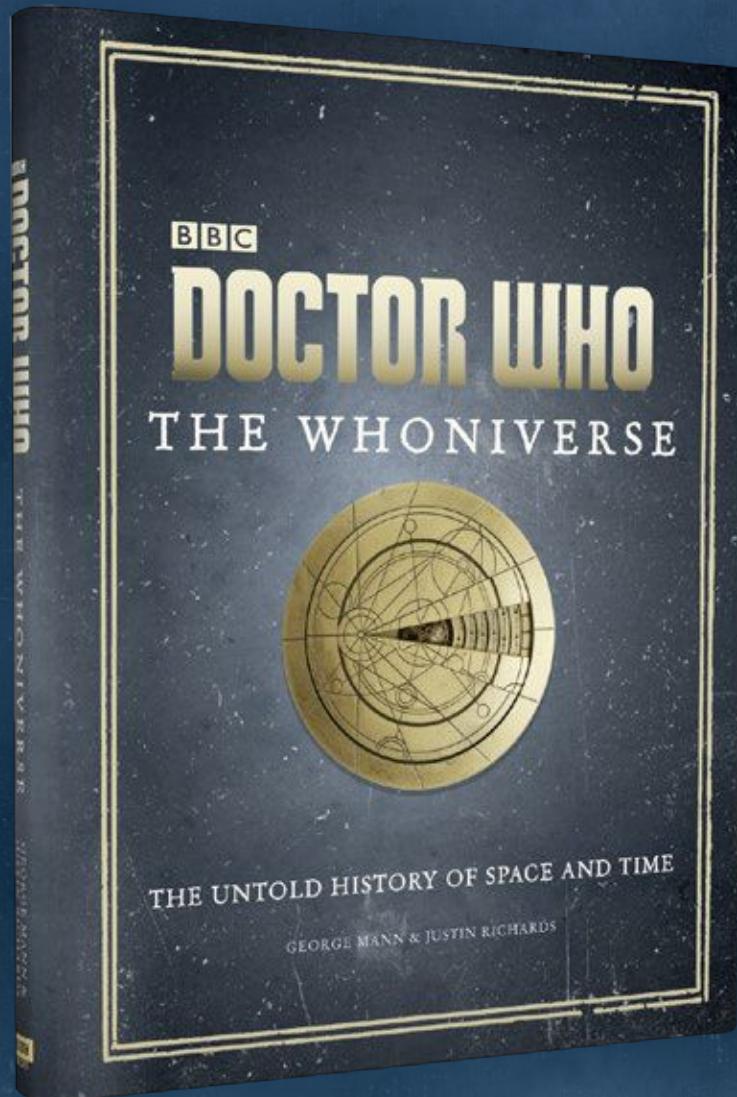
## Twelfth Doctor Loses Stuff in New Audios

BBC Audio has announced a new series of linked adventures featuring the Twelfth Doctor and two new companions, brother and sister team Brandon and Alex Yow. The first, *The Lost Angel*, will feature the Weeping Angels in contemporary New York and will be released on January 5th, 2017. It's written by George Mann and Cavan Scott and read by *Day of the Moon* actor Kerry Shale. This will be followed by *The Lost Planet* by Mann on March 2nd, which features the TARDIS being taken over by alien plants, and *The Lost Magic* by Scott on May 4th. Finally, there'll be a fourth as-yet-unnamed instalment with Mann and Scott back together on writing duties.

## Who Merchandise Museum Seeks Crowdfunding

**Doctor Who** fans love collecting memorabilia, but one problem often arises – where do you put it all? This problem is particularly bad for former STARBURST writer David J. Howe, who has possibly the largest collection of **Who** items in the world. David and his partner, author Sam Stone, plan to put it all into their 'Doctor Who Merchandise Museum' just outside Sleaford in Lincolnshire, but are appealing to the public to raise the funds needed to get the building into shape. When opened, the museum will include genuine props including a spacesuit from *The Sontaran Experiment* and a Sisterhood costume from *The Brain of Morbius*, as well as original 1960s toys and literally thousands of other items. It wouldn't be open to the public all year round, rather on specific open days and via private appointment, but would no doubt be worth visiting, if only to feel inferior about the state of your own collection. David and Sam's crowdfunding page can be found on Indiegogo.

With FULL-COLOUR ILLUSTRATIONS, MAPS, and PHOTOGRAPHY throughout, this is the essential companion to this universe and an astonishing compendium of the races that live within it



# THE WHONIVERSE

## OUT NOW



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# WATCHING DOCTOR WHO

AN IN-DEPTH LOOK  
AT THE WHONIVERSE  
BY JR SOUTHALL



*[Handwritten signature]*

With Doctor Who fans' thoughts currently turned towards this year's Christmas Special, an episode generally watched by a considerably larger audience than regularly tune into the programme during the course of a series, my own thoughts turned this month to the idea of how casual viewers might see Doctor Who. After all, while the likes of *The Walking Dead* and even *Game of Thrones* sit fairly easily within specific genres, Doctor Who is of necessity a unique experience, quite unlike anything else on television, even those programmes - the *Privevals* and the *Crime Travellers* - that have over the years sought to replicate something of what makes it work.

So I conducted a little experiment. Or rather, I asked Facebook and the premier Doctor Who Internet forum Gallifrey Base to conduct a little experiment on my behalf. "Could you," I typed, "ask somebody you know who isn't a fan - a spouse, parent, colleague or friend - to name the first ten things that spring to mind when you say the words 'Doctor Who'?" I was curious to see

whether non-fans think of the programme in the same way we do - and I even set up an alternative thread on Gallifrey Base asking fans to pose the same question to themselves, that I might compare the results.

One respondent spectacularly missed the point of the question, instead listing ten things - in an intense amount of detail - about Steven Moffat's writing that he dislikes, giving the impression of someone who spends his every waking minute thinking about the subject. But that was an isolated incident, and the rest of the answers were more interesting.

The non-fans whose responses were given tended to repeat certain things; all but one said Daleks, for example, and the Cybermen, TARDIS, and K9 were routinely mentioned. Oddly, roughly half the respondents named an actor who had played the Doctor, this varying from Matt Smith to Paul McGann and a number of mentions of 'the scarf' to, in a couple of instances, William Hartnell (one from David's mother-in-law who also brought up the "girl

that was married to Chris Evans" - and 'the companion' was also a common reply; the other from Red Ripper's mother-in-law, who said "That Sgt. Major bloke from *The Army Game and Carry On*"). The Weeping Angels, 'that Saturday night thing', and the scare factor ('behind the sofa!') also each got a couple of mentions.

A few of the non-fan replies were more amusing. Tristan's wife, in Australia, talked about how "Canary yellow hand-knitted jumpers with pictures of TARDISes on grown men are not cool," citing 'nerd club' as the reason for her thought, while Private Wyatt's wife gave a number of interesting responses, including "I bet that man is secretly an alien ... oh yes look, someone is peeling their face off ... again," and "Missing episodes... What do you mean they lost them? And they randomly turn up in Africa?", which probably says more about her husband's obsessions than it does her experiences of Doctor Who.

Jason's sister-in-law's comment about "Oh, the toys. Costs a fortune," told a story about a particular parent's familiarity

with the series, and both Suzy and Paul's friend in his forties brought up the subject of "wobbly sets." The music was another common factor, and some of the odder things mentioned were Ann's husband's "a bit Dad's Army" on account of its 'funny Majors', Mark's wife's mention of the 'Question Mark umbrella' and Christine's brother talking about a "monster topping a house."

Ann's husband also came out with the following, an interesting series of observations: "The Doctor doesn't die, but looks as if he's going to," "Not too horrific," "Scares the kids but the fact that the Doc can't die makes it a bit tame for adults," and "Can take itself too seriously." Dylan's thirty-year-old female Australian friend included 'celery' on her list.

It seems the non-fans were most frequently bringing up the things they'd see in the programme, rather than external things that *Doctor Who* might remind them of. In the thread for fans themselves to try a similar experiment, the story was a little different.

Among the obligatory mentions of Daleks and the TARDIS, Red Ripper nominated 'Seasons 12 – 14' and Target novelisations, followed up with Robert Holmes and 'archives' from Summer Dayes. Frankyboywonder nominated 'running' and 'adventure', while Mr. Shortt cited 'Adric's broken badge.' A picture was beginning to emerge of the specific things certain people were reminded of from when they were presumably A Certain Age, but then Vain Insect mentioned 'joy', 'the wonder', and 'My children and I,' and suddenly there were a wealth of responses getting to the heart of what makes *Doctor Who* fans so in love with the series.

Betawho talked of 'friendship', 'gentleness' and again, 'joy', Jason M brought up "Anticipation in all extremes and from all angles" and Loonyboyx gave simply 'love' as one of his answers. "Jam sandwiches made with Mother's Pride," said The Phantom Piper, while Tlotoxl started with 'Wonder', 'Childhood' and 'Imagination', before concluding, "A thread through my entire life, sometimes frayed, sometimes tangled but always a part of my own

personal fabric of Time and Space."

"The series helping me escape the real world when my twin brother died aged 12 from cancer in 1976," said The Great One, in the saddest and most personal of all the replies.

There were plenty of mentions of the theme music and title sequence, and the missing episodes and Target novels were cited quite frequently, while various Doctors and companions got name checked along with sundry stories, with Ribs even nominating *The Invisible Enemy*.

But DdWho's post, repeated here in full, seemed to sum things up for a lot of the respondents (who, incidentally, were asked not to read one another's replies before answering themselves): "He's at odds with the world like me, There are no guns or uniforms, It sets my mind free, There are no limits, Friendship not romance, It's funny and scary, Being clever is okay, Fitting in is giving up, History, Character not spaceships; This is just the things that come to mind to me about the show that have meaning."

Eastwind talked about "Watching recons on VHS years ago, seeing those two-to three-second bursts of motion every now and then,

and getting a real sense of the depth and history of the show, and a regret at how much of it was lost," d bongo included 'alcohol', 'My old room in Edinburgh', Doritos, and "My first sexual experience" as part of his list, and softmachine mentioned "knowing there were Doctors years and decades before I started watching/was born." RKSDoom's citation of 'Intelligence', 'Imagination' and 'Heart' seemed to sum up a lot of the feeling about *Doctor Who*.

RAYMAC said, "Buying DW Monthly from newsagents and looking at all the photos of stories that I had never seen before and would probably never get to see - little did I realise that I'd eventually be able to have most of them on my shelf at home and watch them whenever I wanted to!", Professor T brought up "*The Hips of Decency* (c.f. Harlan Ellison's intro to the US novelisations)" and PrivateWyatt added, "Things not being quite how you remember them, when you watch something later in life."

On the other hand, Norton Canes talked of "Nyssa, Skirt, <redacted> (Not sure that was such a good idea)", and al d's reply was simply "Zoe in a catsuit" repeated ten times over.

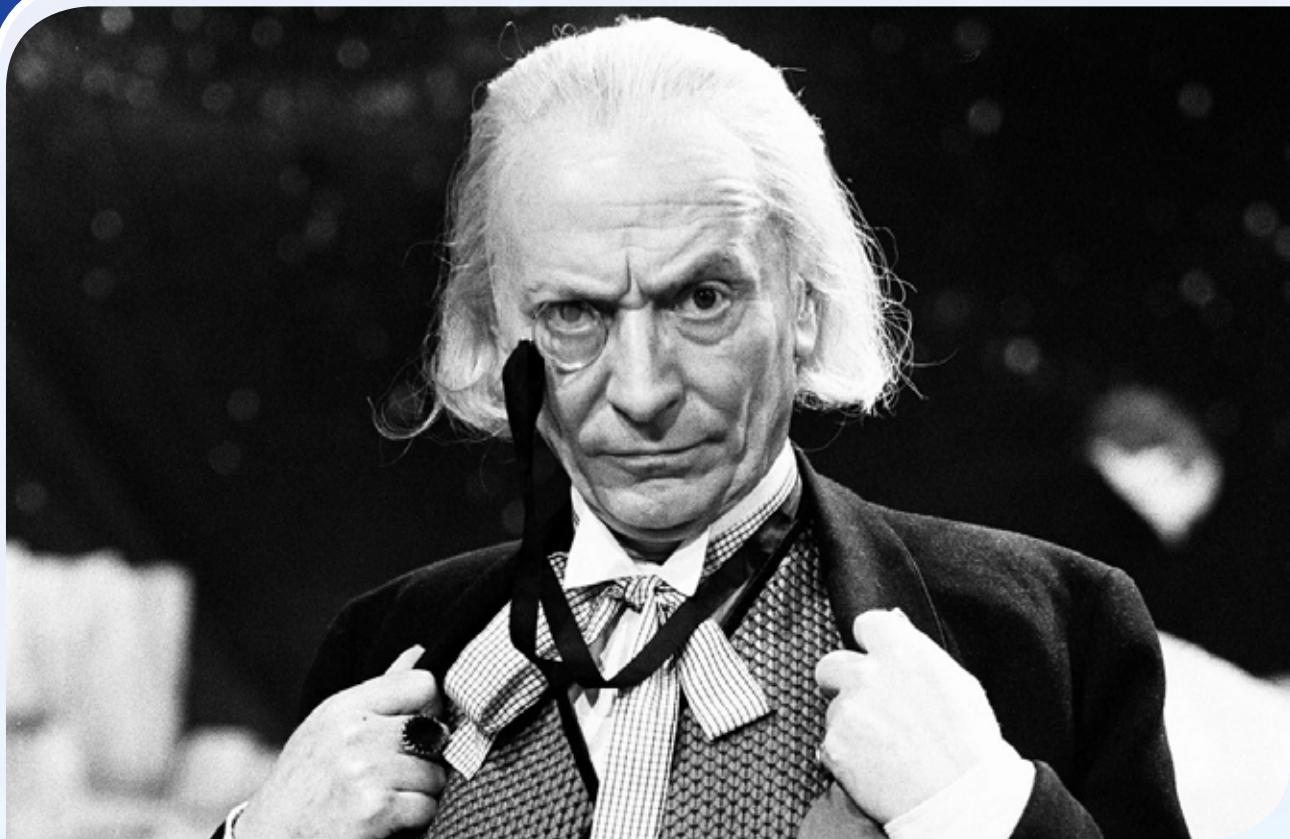
It would be wrong to try and draw any rational conclusions from what is in essence such a tiny survey group. But while both groups named any number of visual references to what they'd seen on the screen, it was the fans who went that step further and got into how the programme made them feel, what it made them think about. More than just the anticipation of seeing new episodes, *Doctor Who* is about a worldview, a way of seeing things.

For myself, thinking of *Doctor Who* brings back happy childhood memories of Yorkshire seaside trips to an amusement arcade with a red Ride-In Dalek, and Saturday afternoons running around outside, interrupted by the familiar sound of Mr Teggy's ice cream van, which would turn up at around half past four signalling the imminence of sausage sandwiches and that familiar spooky music on the television. Oh, and scarves Sarah Jane, and jelly babies, of course.

ARTWORK BY SIMON BRETT



STARBURST



## THE ORIGINAL ROGUE

**W**ith fifty years having passed since the introduction of the Cybermen into *Doctor Who* lore just as the man who started it all was about to take a final bow at the conclusion of *The Tenth Planet*, what better time to take a look at the original rogue one as portrayed by William Hartnell? Arguably, it was perfect casting, having been suggested as a candidate for the lead role after his performance in *This Sporting Life* as an ageing rugby talent scout known only as Dad.

Of course, he would be known to those who watched his Doctor as grandfather to Carole Ann Ford's Susan Foreman, with Episode One playing out as a kitchen sink drama of sorts as Coal Hill School teachers Ian Chesterton (William Russell) and Barbara Wright (Jacqueline Hill) trail her home to a Shoreditch scrap merchants, quickly becoming concerned for her welfare.

**DOCTOR:** What are you doing here?

**IAN:** We're looking for a young girl.

**DOCTOR:** We?

**BARBARA:** Good evening.

**DOCTOR:** What do you want?

**IAN:** One of our pupils, Susan Foreman, came into this yard.

**DOCTOR:** Really? In here? Are you sure?

**BARBARA:** Yes, we saw her from across the street.

**DOCTOR:** One of their pupils, not the police, then.

**IAN:** I beg your pardon?

**DOCTOR:** Why were you spying on her? Who are you?

The likes of Dennis Potter and Shelagh Delaney may well have been agog at further

revelations, mind, for the old boy in the Astrakhan hat is nowhere near as grubby as the above exchange implies. He is, in fact, a traveller from another world...

A traveller with no control over his chosen mode of transport, stolen from a



workshop back on Gallifrey - his home, which he would later claim to have left simply because he was bored. It's implied that he's been down here on Earth for quite some time, and several novels and audio stories have subsequently attempted to document the scrapes he was getting into beforehand. Though he appears elderly and vaguely wizened at first, he will later imply that in doing so he was actually trying to cover up his relative youth and inexperience. Ah, the benefit of hindsight. And indeed, a literal fresh pair of eyes to look back through later on.

To an extent, though, the reason is he at first appears little more than a harrumphing history teacher with a time machine that happens to look like a police box (another symbol of authority to viewers of the time, as well as an instantly recognisable exterior for what he would rather drolly dub simply 'the ship') is that's exactly what he was required to be by a BBC bound to Lord Reith's original mission statement for the great bastion of British broadcasting.

Its first director general had said that its core values were to 'inform, educate and entertain' those watching in black and white at home. To that end, Sydney Newman's new series was to be split between science fiction and history. Where better to start than at the beginning, as the young crank and his newest travelling companions, those poor shell-shocked teachers, find themselves forced to band together after a diversion to the Stone Age to witness the quest for fire at first hand.

In a sense, this is also at least in part the first *pure* historical story - the Doctor having no alien technology other than the TARDIS, and reliant on smarts to pull himself out of a jam using only his wits and whatever he has to hand, in this case a box of matches. Popularly, though, the first narrative to be properly credited as such concerns Marco Polo - the 'flying caravan' materialising on the road to Cathay as the titular Venetian explorer makes his way to the court of



Mongolian emperor Kublai Khan.

Hardly slouching on the sci-fi front, either, in between there's *The Daleks*, needing no introduction as the first appearance of his oldest foes and an encounter that helps to cement a growing sense of humanity in him, helped along by Coal Hill's finest from the moment Chesterton stops him whacking a Neanderthal with a rock, and the entirely TARDIS-set *Edge Of Destruction*; the tension palpable as the venerable machine he won't even dream of dubbing 'sexy' attempts to warn everyone that something's badly wrong in a first display of implied sentience on its part.

Damn that fiddly Fast Return Switch, eh? There's even a first taste of romance

for the universe's least likely lover-man in *The Aztecs*, as he manages to woo the lovely Cameca and promptly walks out of an engagement to her to spirit himself off to the Sense-Sphere, having gone to the trouble of making some hot chocolate - the drink, that is, not simply wowing her by producing a copy of *You Sexy Thing* and whirling his jacket over his head *Full Monty*-style!

If to date you've seen only 'Nu-Who' and are perfectly used to seeing the likes of Christopher Eccleston, David Tennant, and Matt Smith casually doing a spot of temporal mucking about, their predecessor's stinging rebuke to Miss Wright as she attempts to do the same for what she sees as a perfectly valid reason will seem something of a contradiction...

**BARBARA:** *It's no good, Doctor, my mind's made up. This is the beginning of the end of the Sun God.*

**DOCTOR:** *What are you talking about?*

**BARBARA:** *Don't you see? If I could start the destruction of everything that's evil here, then everything that is good would survive when Cortes lands.*

**DOCTOR:** *But you can't rewrite history! Not one line!*

At least for now he'll stick to a policy of non-intervention - barring an accident in *The Romans* that leads to the complete rebuilding of perhaps history's greatest recorded empire, setting fire to Nero's plans and promptly being dubbed a genius for doing so even if he's not so hot on the lyre. Just a year later, though, Hartnell would be forced to bow out by ill health or producer choice, depending on point of view, a quick lay down and blurry changeover into Patrick Troughton the end result.

Fittingly given the season, our final words must mirror those spoken by Hartnell at the conclusion of *The Feast of Steven* - a Merry Christmas to all of you at home.

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY



# REVIEWS

THE LATEST  
DOCTOR WHO  
RELEASES REVIEWED  
AND RATED



## THE HERALDS OF DESTRUCTION #2

**WRITER:** PAUL CORNELL  
**ARTIST:** CHRISTOPHER JONES  
**PUBLISHER:** TITAN COMICS  
**RELEASE DATE:** OUT NOW

Issue two of Titan's new Paul Cornell-scripted Third Doctor romp now establishes the series not as a serious attempt to properly evoke the storytelling style and motifs of the Pertwee era – there are no brainy boffins or pompous politicians for the Doctor to deflate or,

indeed, any new supporting characters at all – but a chance for us to remind ourselves just why the 1970s era of Doctor Who is still so fondly regarded.

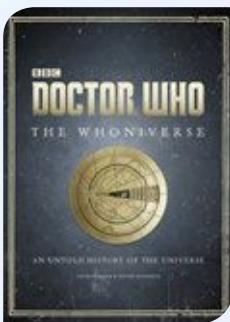
This second edition revels in its cast of TV-familiar faces and Cornell continues his pleasingly authentic recreations of them all as they now stand squarely centre-stage with even the 'Earth invasion' conceit of the first episode shunted aside somewhat to allow us to spend more quality time with the Third Doctor, his UNIT 'family' and his old enemy the Master. Readers of the first issue will recall that the Second Doctor has also turned up, sent by the Time Lords (the story is set after tenth anniversary TV yarn *The Three Doctors*) to help the Third Doctor combat his latest enemy.

As the Doctors combine their titanic intellects to try to work out what the new alien arrivals want with planet Earth, the Brigadier, still out in the field where the aliens are attempting to establish a foothold in a quiet suburban street (as 1970s Doctor Who aliens were often inclined to do), receives a visit from UNIT high-up General Mayhew. But the Brigadier quickly realises this isn't the general, it's the fiendish Master wearing

one of his convincing replica face-masks that, Cornell cleverly explains, are a part of his living TARDIS. He uses the expanding mask to effect a spectacular escape from the UNIT chopper ferrying him back to UNIT HQ, which allows the Brigadier to inform the Doctor that "the Master got away using his face as a parachute" which is a glorious, cherishable line of dialogue by any reasonable standard.

Back at the Doctor's UNIT lab, Jo Grant has been attacked and infected by the 'transforming' alien interloper and the Third Doctor takes a trip into her psyche, which is as fab, groovy and far-out psychedelic as we might have expected. But the alien intruder already has a firm grip on Jo and, as another quality cliffhanger suggests, it isn't about to let go without a fight. Richly imaginative, *The Heralds of Destruction* is shaping up into a warm, witty and wonderfully nostalgic little comic strip which doesn't concern itself with being dark, brooding and menacing and is just happy having some good old-fashioned fun.

PAUL MOUNT



## DOCTOR WHO: THE WHONIVERSE – THE UNTOLD STORY OF SPACE AND TIME

**AUTHOR:** GEORGE MANN, JUSTIN RICHARDS  
**PUBLISHER:** BBC BOOKS  
**RELEASE DATE:** OUT NOW

Let's be honest – continuity in Doctor Who is an omnishambles. Were the UNIT stories set in the '70s or '80s? Which Cybermen are from Mondas, and which from the parallel Earth? And how exactly was the universe changed by the Time War?

So enthusiastic is the show to shrug these questions off and run along to the next story that any book aiming to provide a complete history of the Who

universe – or the, ahem, Whoniverse – has a monumental task ahead of it. But that's just what George Mann and Justin Richards have set out to do.

Before we get onto how well it has managed this, we must enthuse about how bloody gorgeous this book is; a big hardback tome with lusly padded cover, it looks awesome on any coffee table. As the book is set in-universe, it avoids using episode screenshots, that may take away from the immersion, and instead is illustrated by Alex Fort, Richard Hardy, Chris J. Lees, and Shaun Williams, who bring everything from Sontaran scout ships to the Gallifrey Citadel to life in stunning colour. However, there is a blurb going around describing The Whoniverse as containing "full-colour illustrations, maps, charts and photography throughout", which simply isn't true – sorry map and chart fans, it's just the illustrations!

Onto the actual content... Mann and Richards begin with the Big Bang (as created by the spaceship Terminus, of course) and end with the heat death of the universe (with humanity's final search for Utopia). But they mainly focus on the history of Earth, occasionally going off on tangents to discuss the Cybermen, Daleks, Time Lords, and the Time War.

Though the way the authors have assembled all points of human history has clearly had extensive work put into it, the

downside is that it often comes across as a chronological list of TV Who stories – for example, summarising the 1651-set *The Woman Who Lived* followed by the 1666-set *The Visitation* without adding anything to the stories, making any meaningful link, or justifying why either would be seen as relevant to an-in-universe history of Earth. Consequently, large portions of the book do seem a wasted opportunity, particularly in the age of wikis when all this can be looked up anyway.

The book does improve in the final chapter, which details the Time War – as this has never been fully chronicled on screen, Mann and Richards are able to take more creative licence, and provide a coherent and entertaining a history of said conflict as has ever been published, bringing in elements from Mann's novel *Engines of War* as well as some original ideas.

While this may be too little too late, particularly for those fans who've already seen every story and so won't learn much new, it is worth restating that the high production quality means everyone will get something out of *The Whoniverse*. It may not live up to its concept's full potential, but it's a worthy addition to any bookshelf or coffee table.

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BBC

# DOCTOR WHO

## CHRISTMAS SPECIAL PREVIEW:

### THE RETURN OF DOCTOR MYSTERIO

by JR Southall

**STARBURST'S RESIDENT  
WHO-RU TAKES A LOOK AT  
WHAT WE CAN EXPECT FROM  
THIS YEAR'S SEASONAL SPECIAL...**





**I**t's no secret that last year's *Doctor Who* Christmas Special was once thought by Steven Moffat to be probably his last episode in charge of the programme. Having dealt with his ongoing plot concerns in *Hell Bent*, *The Husbands of River Song* was the showrunner returning to his most frequently recurring creation and filling in the last remaining meaningful gaps in her story. But given that Moffat was then persuaded to stay with the series and produce another year's worth of episodes, the question that begs itself is: where will the writer go next?

Russell T Davies' Christmas episodes were frequently brash, sunny affairs that served to pastiche popular holiday movies of the past; *Independence Day*, *Bringing Up Baby*, and *The Poseidon Adventure* among others, provided the inspiration for the likes of *The Christmas Invasion*, *The Runaway Bride*, and *Voyage of the Damned*. Davies was content to tell spectacular, character-driven stories that usually had very little to do with the Yuletide festival, beyond the use of

various Christmas trappings – laid on in order to try and persuade the watching audience that they weren't really watching something that would have been better off set in the middle of summer instead. Steven Moffat took a vastly different approach, his own Christmas Specials on the whole looking and behaving considerably more festively, telling stories of redemptive and homecoming journeys and generally avoiding the pitfalls of filming in the July sun.

The thing that really connects the early Moffat specials is the nature of the stories they take their inspiration from; rather than look to Hollywood's past as Davies had done, Moffat instead sought influence from classic literature, and the shadows of Dickens, C. S. Lewis and even Sir Arthur Conan Doyle are clear for all to see. Latterly, however, Steven Moffat has been incorporating cinematic references more and more heavily in his seasonal episodes, although rather than seeking inspiration from the established greats, he has as well included allusions to filmmakers such as Christopher

Nolan alongside the obvious *Alien*, *The Thing from Another World* and screwball comedy influences.

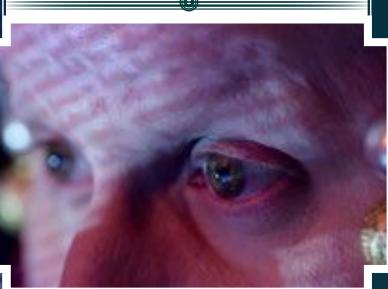
This year, Steven Moffat is coming bang up to date, and the 2016 *Doctor Who* Christmas Special will reflect the big popular cinematic genre du jour; *The Return of Doctor Mysterio* will be a superhero story. According to the preview blurb from the BBC, 'the Doctor, played by Peter Capaldi, joins forces with an investigative journalist, played by Charity Wakefield (*Wolf Hall*, *The Player*) and a superhero to save New York from a deadly alien threat.'

Canadian actor Justin Chatwin, who has come a long way since appearing as Tom Cruise's son in Steven Spielberg's *War of the Worlds* eleven years ago, plays the superhero Grant, and in an indication of what Steven Moffat's emphasis in the episode might be, the *Doctor Who* showrunner has said, "I've always loved superheroes and this Christmas *Doctor Who* dives into that world. My favourite superhero is Clark Kent. Not Superman, Clark Kent." It's a hint that the human side of characters such as *A Christmas Carol*'s Kazran Sardick is what still excites the writer, who has a notable aversion to writing old-fashioned two-dimensional villains in his stories; if Moffat's quote is anything to go by, *The Return of Doctor Mysterio* will be as much an investigation of what makes the superhero tick, rather than simply a catalogue of exciting set pieces.

Indeed, according to Moffat's *Sherlock* co-creator Mark Gatiss, speaking at an event at the Victoria and Albert Museum in September, "The Christmas special I think is one of Steve's best ever scripts, absolutely beautiful. It made me cry." And that was just the words on the page.

Chatwin himself said, "Working with the amazing people at *Doctor Who* has been one of the most fun and rewarding projects I've ever had the pleasure of





*being involved with.*" What isn't yet clear is what form this year's seasonal threat will take, beyond the BBC press release's assertion that it will be deadly (it goes without saying) and alien (which should also be taken as read in *Doctor Who*).

There is also the question of whether the eponymous Doctor Mysterio is Chatwin's character's alter ego – or maybe the name by which he knows the Doctor. After all, back in 1989, the Seventh Doctor was known as Merlin for a story, and it wouldn't be a surprise to find Steven Moffat revealing the reason why Grant might know the Doctor by a previously unheard pseudonym during a timey-wimey excursion in the episode itself, in a similar fashion to the writer's unravelling of Sardick's history in his very first Christmas Special.

With Steven Moffat having said that Series Ten companion Bill "will not be in *Christmas [2016]*, because that would blow the series launch... So there'll be somebody else – a different, guest companion – this Christmas, like how *River Song* played the companion role in last year's *Special*," it's tempting to imagine that Grant will be teaming up with the Doctor as this year's one-off companion character (in lieu of Pearl Mackie's Bill arriving in *A Star in Her Eye*, her tentatively titled first episode next spring); that appears not to be the case.

*"The Doctor won't have a temporary companion this Christmas and essentially that space will be taken by Nardole,"* said a BBC source, "*He's not a companion as such but it's not as if he doesn't play a similar role.*"

Nardole, of course, was the alien assistant to River Song in last year's Christmas Special, and ended the episode as one of several disembodied heads adorning a rather cumbersome red robot. From the look of the footage the BBC released in October promoting *The Return of Doctor Mysterio*, Nardole will once again be full-bodied; how that comes to be the case will be one of the many questions regarding the character that fans will be hoping (but perhaps not

expecting) to see answered.

What will fill a certain fraction of fandom with horror, and the others with delight, is that the return of Nardole also sees the return of *Little Britain's* Matt Lucas to *Doctor Who*. Having played a small role with Nardole in *The Husbands of River Song*, Lucas will now be a recurring companion character, continuing on into Series Ten itself. Christel Dee, host of the official *Doctor Who: The Fan Show* and who was invited to the episode's read-through, said, *"It was really interesting to see the Doctor and Nardole together as a companion. Nardole is quite different from your normal companion. Most companions are, like, impressed by everything – and it's not that Nardole's not impressed – but what I like about him is he's almost like an anti-companion. He's kinda like, 'Can we not? Doctor, don't do that. No.' But not in a horrible way – in a really, really funny way. They make such a great double act that's going to make for a really funny Christmas special."*

What won't have escaped the eagle eyes of long-term fans is the significance of the special's title. *El Doctor Mysterio*, and variations thereof, was the name by which the original series of *Doctor Who* was broadcast in Spanish speaking territories, such as Mexico and Venezuela. Steven Moffat will be well aware of this and the name of the Christmas Special – while probably not significant in terms of the plot – is undoubtedly no coincidence.

The sixty-minute special *The Return of Doctor Mysterio* also stars Adetomiwa Edun (*Lucifer*, *Bates Motel*), Aleksandar Jovanovic and Logan Hoffman with a script by Steven Moffat, executive produced by Brian Minchin, produced by Peter Bennett, and directed by Ed Bazalgette (*Poldark*, and Series Nine's *The Girl Who Died and The Woman Who Lived*). \*

*The DOCTOR WHO Christmas Episode is broadcast on BBC One on December 25th.*



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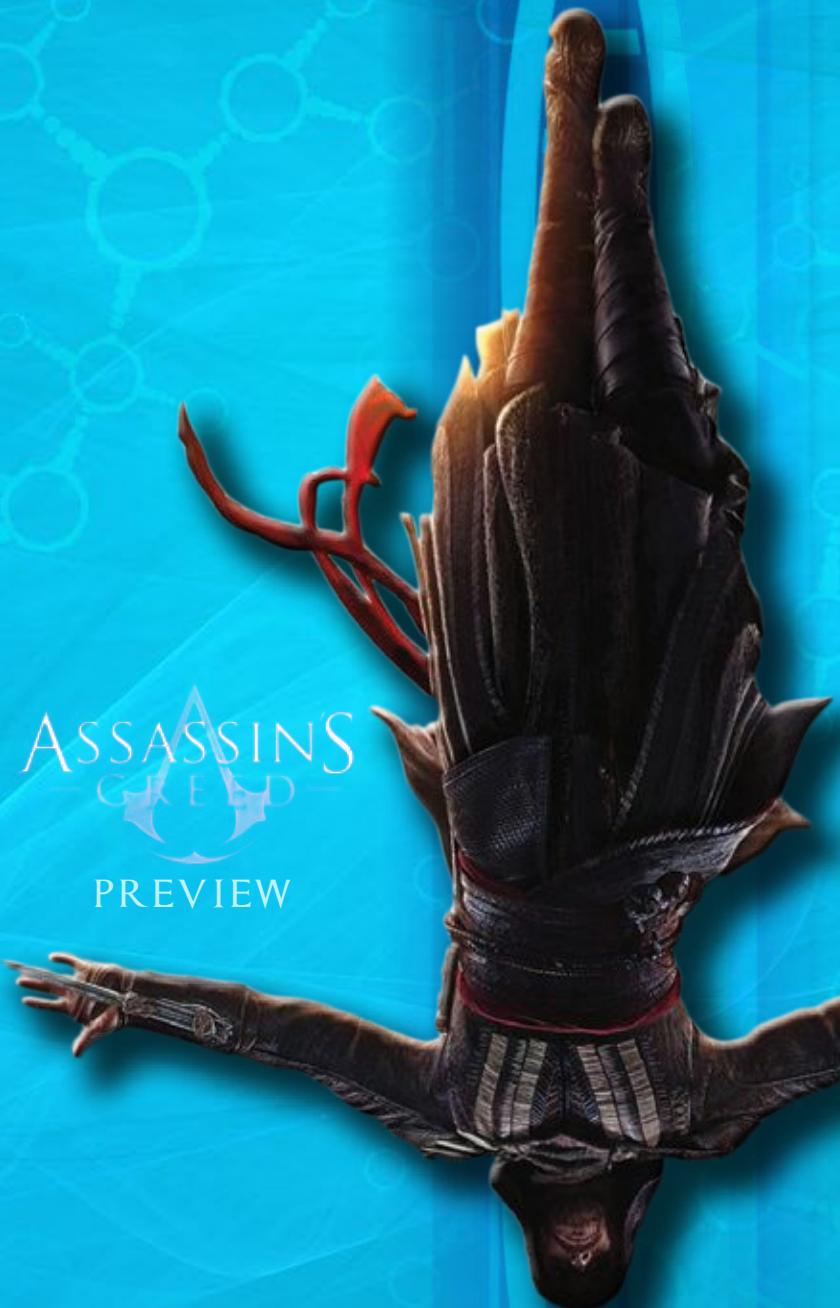
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# NOTHING IS TRUE, EVERYTHING IS PERMITTED

BY JAMES EVANS

ASSASSIN'S  
CREED

PREVIEW



The wait is almost over for the big screen adaptation of the hugely popular video game ASSASSIN'S CREED - but can it possibly live up to expectations?

In the world of the movies, there are some long-held, universally accepted 'truths': odd number Star Trek movies were franchise-threateningly crap, Jaws began the summer blockbuster, and video game adaptations make for lousy films. In reality, most of those odd *Star Trek* movies have their merits, and *Jaws* alone didn't change the face and focus of summer cinema. However, even though almost every flick based on a computer game has its fans somewhere (the *Resident Evil* series is heading for its sixth film next year, after all - despite no one making an argument for it being great cinema), there's more than a kernel of genuine truth in the argument that games make for poor translations to multiplexes. Starting with the misjudged catastrophe of *Super Mario Bros.* in 1993, a film that has little chance of ever being subject to critical reappraisal (indeed, star Bob Hoskins noted in 2007 that he still believed it was the worst thing he'd ever been involved in), these films have routinely met with poor reviews, disappointing box office, and little respect.

Into this inauspicious arena steps the upcoming film of the *Assassin's Creed* games. When numerous others have failed to make a genuinely successful film that appeals to both the players who have spent innumerable

hours in the virtual world of the game and a wider movie audience, what is potentially different this time? Let's start with the title itself, and how it offers a much more easily approachable subject for a film. With the aforementioned *Super Mario Bros.* and titles like *Mortal Kombat*, the first problem was trying to find a way to take often very rudimentary characters and repetitive and simplistic plots and settings, then mould them into something recognisable as a worthwhile basis for a film. When console technology was significantly more basic than it is now, a cursory assessment of the games of twenty or twenty-five years ago showed little to base a project on.

Subsequently, many earlier films of games embellished or altered their source material so much they became almost unrelated to the original concept, or clumsy and ill-thought out in how they tried to shoehorn a functional game world into a two-hour film with a beginning, middle and an end (you can understand the much missed Bob's frustration). Conversely, as the ability to create more in-depth gaming worlds began to develop, greater investment and involvement for players became possible. This led to an unexpected reversal: games explicitly aping their more complex cousin film in their design. The original *Max Payne*, released in 2001, was an entertaining homage to any number of hardboiled neo-noir movies with a highly cinematic style. But when that game had its turn to be made into a film in 2008, it failed with audiences and with fans of the game, a common experience leaving both disappointed. Something was still not working in how filmmakers sought to bring the attraction of titles like *Payne*, *Hitman*, *Prince of Persia* et al to the screen. Meanwhile, game makers continued to refine the experience of playing and games got more ambitious. Around the time *Max Payne* was bombing in theatres, the first *Assassin's Creed* game was building a loyal following. As noted elsewhere in this issue, that success has continued across a number of versions of the game, taking in settings from the renaissance to the Victorian area.

Part of what *Creed's* developers seem to have understood when constructing the game series is the need to develop an enticing fictional world, anchor it to layered characters and fill the games with visceral action that brings people back again and again. In fact, it's the same thing that the best movie series are capable of doing too, from *Star Wars* via *Indiana Jones*, up to and including the Marvel successes of recent years. And so we find ourselves with gaming franchises where the similarities between what makes the game work and what makes a film work are not so different, and indeed, where films have directly inspired the world that is created (the *GTA* series being a prime example). If you didn't know Mario and someone told you their idea for a film based on a plumber chasing after a princess and jumping up and down on



mushrooms, you'd likely tell them to go back to the drawing board. But the idea of *Assassin's Creed* is quite obviously cinematic in concept and scope, with influences from movies like *The Matrix* series evident in the construction. It's no surprise a film of the series has been in development for almost as long as the games have existed.

A great concept that should translate to film is a good start, but there are other signs *Assassin's Creed* is aiming for much more than the average adaptation where expectation is low. The obvious starting point is the presence of Michael Fassbender. Many people know him as Magneto in the recent *X-Men* films and as an actor who is familiar with genre material and comfortable working within it. Fassbender is also an Oscar-nominated actor of some considerable standing. This is not a B-movie lead headlining, but instead someone even the haughtiest of critics concedes is talented. Fassbender has been attached to the project almost since its inception and has been heavily involved in the development of the film. If most lead characters in games are simply there to function only as far as is needed to push the game mechanics forward, which doesn't seem likely to interest an actor of Fassbender's ilk.

However, interviews with him throughout development show how he has been working to bring the concept to life in a way that gives the actors something real to work with, by providing depth to the characters and world of the film, and giving the audience something to engage with. Fassbender has also talked about respecting the game world but seeking to bring new parts to it, and approaching them cinematically while staying true to the core elements. The redesign of the Animus that propels protagonist Cal back into his ancestor's world is an example. Replacing the chair of the games with a huge arm makes the experience more visual and immediate, keeps to the principle of the game but brings it alive for new audiences. The main story is also not a direct adaptation of any of the games but is heavily inspired by them. When career criminal Cal is pulled from his own execution by the mysterious Abstergo Industries and made to participate in their Animus Project, he learns about his own past, his ancestor's struggle, and finally finds a cause he can believe in. An arc of redemption and sacrifice is always a juicy one for any actor.

Along with Fassbender in the lead, the movie is supported by a very impressive cast. Academy Award winners Marion Cotillard and Jeremy Irons have prominent roles. Joining them are respected character actors Brendan Gleeson and Michael K. Williams (still known and loved by many as Omar from HBO's *The Wire*). If a cast can be taken as any suggestion of the quality and standard of the project, then this is another indicator *Assassin's Creed* is not being treated as just another adaptation but rather something that should be taken

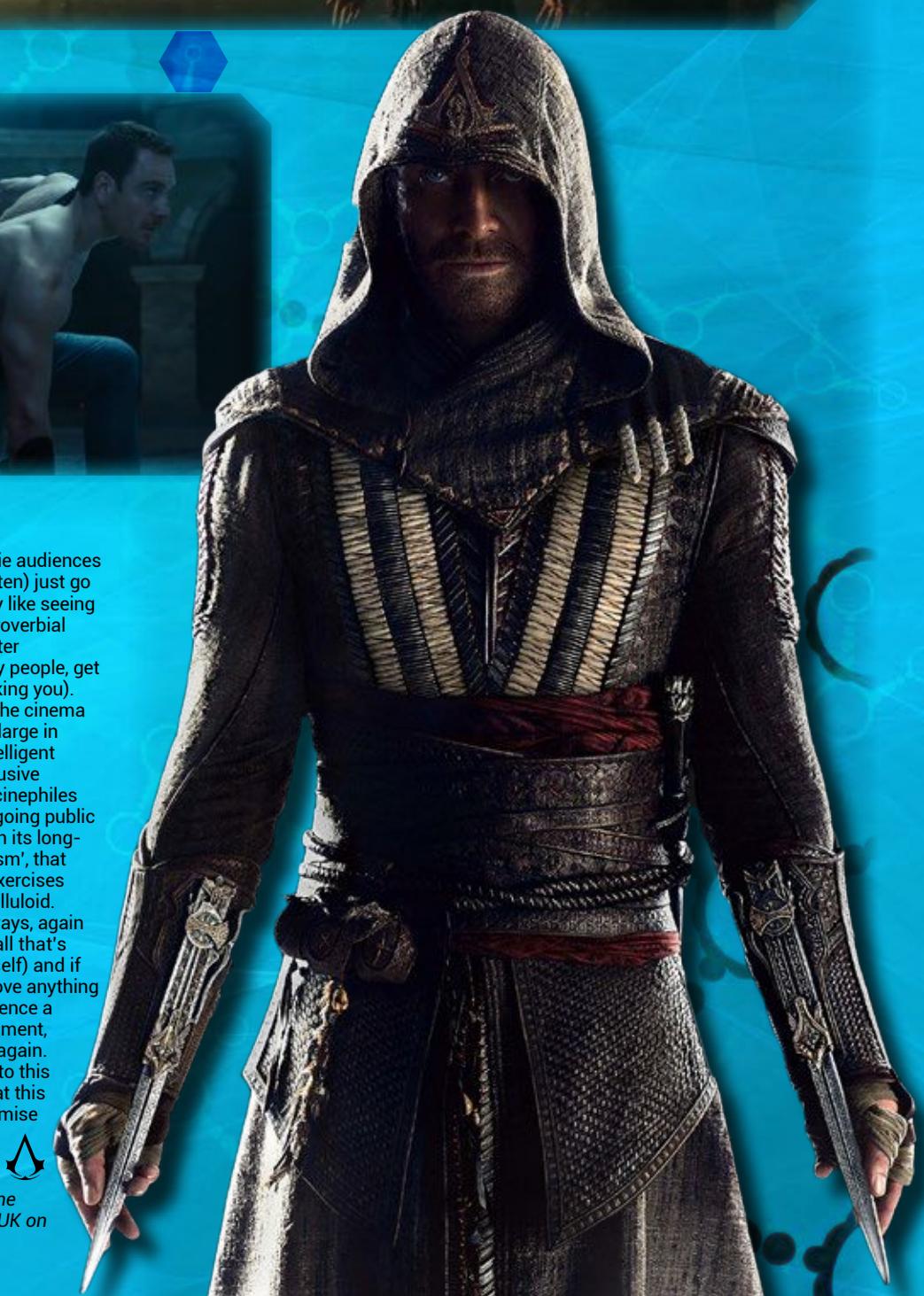




seriously and appeal to many. In the director's chair, we have Justin Kurzel, a respected writer and director and again, not a hack or studio choice but someone with a connection to Fassbender and a serious filmography. Kurzel made his feature début in 2011 with *Snowtown*, a grim true-crime drama based on a series of murders in South Australia in the 1990s. Well received upon release, *Snowtown* has been called a 'brutal endurance test' and it announced Kurzel as a talent to follow. Kurzel and Fassbender have already worked together, on the 2015 version of *Macbeth*, and again this was a hit with critics and audiences. Both actor and director seemingly have a knack and passion for making serious-minded, complex projects that appeal to wide audiences. By approaching *Assassin's Creed* in this manner, there's real promise that this could be something that does just that.

Something else that hints that this project is one a lot is being invested in is the involvement of Ubisoft themselves. Often in other projects, the developer of the game has had little control, either through choice or more often by it being taken out of their hands. In the case of *Assassin's Creed*, Ubisoft has been heavily involved, not only to protect their franchise from being devalued by a poor film version, but also because it seems important to them that this is actually a good film. Partly, this comes from an understanding that products are rarely separate from each other these days. While films often had a movie tie-in book and a soundtrack back in the day, in modern times things are much more linked in and don't exist as separately as before. There's also a more global approach to movies and games these days. Hollywood studios rarely now focus exclusively on an American or solely Western market when developing ideas. How a film will play in a market like China is as important, or even more important. *Assassin's Creed* comes with an inbuilt world that has huge possibilities for expansion. The idea that you could potentially place your characters into any point in history, and take the Templar conspiracy truly worldwide, is a major attraction. *Assassin's Creed* has been co-financed by CatchPlay, a major distributor of movies in Taiwan and China, and this is not coincidental. If the movie is a success in America, then that will be great for those involved, but if the movie can tap into the wider world market, then the opportunities for an interconnected franchise become huge and Ubisoft can only benefit from this.

Talk of markets and product and profit are all well and good, but one thing has held fast from the earliest days of cinema up to the present. A film being good is not always a guarantee of success, just as a film being truly awful is not a guarantee of failure (*Transformers*, we mean you. For shame, Bay, you cinematic savage). But a film being good is more likely to mean it will be long-remembered and develop a fan-base that will clamour for more time to spend in its



world. There's a portion of movie audiences that might sometimes (okay, often) just go to films because they *think* they like seeing money pissed up against the proverbial wall or they don't know any better (*Transformers*, again... seriously people, get it together, Michael Bay is mocking you). But there's also a huge part of the cinema audience that don't view being large in budget and scale and being intelligent entertainment as mutually exclusive things. Pretentious critics and cinephiles would like to have the cinema-going public believe, especially in Britain with its long-standing critical focus on 'realism', that big budget movies are barren exercises in soul-destroying wastes of celluloid. Audiences know better (not always, again *Transformers* - for the love of all that's good and right, Bay, stop yourself) and if *Jaws*, *Star Trek*, and *Marvel* prove anything else, it's that if you give an audience a quality, smart piece of entertainment, they will go back to it time and again. If *Assassin's Creed* can appeal to this audience, then there is hope that this could be the film to finally legitimise the video game adaptation.



ASSASSIN'S CREED opens in the US on December 21st and the UK on January 1st, 2017.



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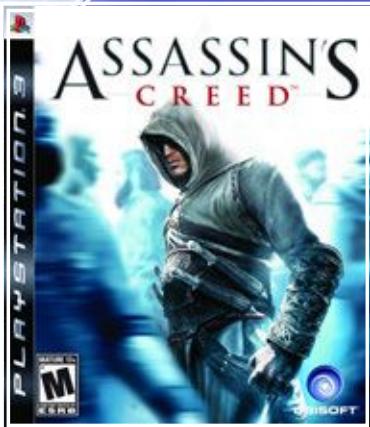
# HIDDEN IN PLAIN WHITE

by Kieron Moore

**As the series takes a leap of faith into cinemas, hook up to the STARBURST Animus and relive the ASSASSIN'S CREED games...**

Finally reaching cinema screens this January, *Assassin's Creed* is one of the gaming industry's most prolific series of the last decade. Having first launched in 2007, there's been a major new *Creed* game almost every year, with two in 2014, as well as numerous spin-off games for mobiles and handheld consoles.

The reason the series has stayed popular over so many instalments is the scope of the concept; set in a world in which two ancient societies – the Assassins and the Knights Templar – have been battling in secret across history, the stories have taken players to a diverse range of settings, from the Crusades-era Holy Land to Victorian London, all connected by framing stories in which modern-day characters experience the past as 'ancestral memories' through a device called the Animus. You may not have an Animus of your own, so instead let STARBURST guide you through our memories of this iconic series...



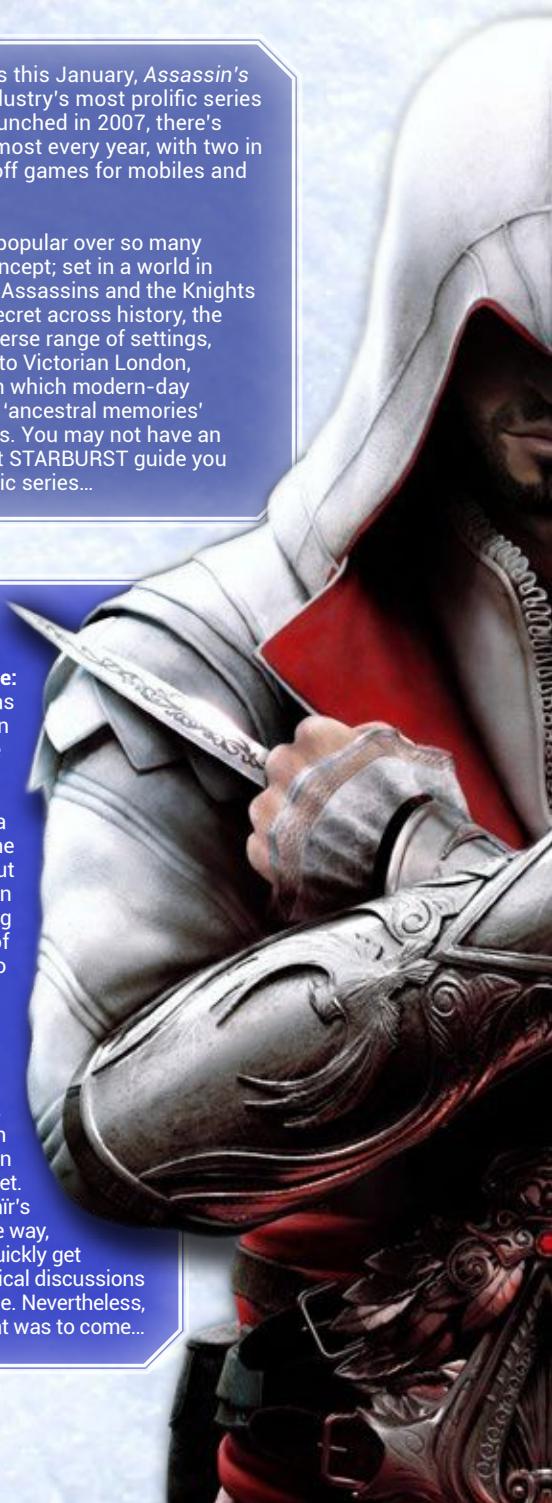
## Assassin's Creed (2007)

### Memory Sequence:

In 2012, bartender Desmond Miles has been kidnapped by an organisation known as Abstergo and is forced to relive the memories of his ancestor Altaïr ibn-La'Ahad, an Assassin living during the time of the Third Crusade. Altaïr has recently botched a mission and so must track down and kill nine Templars to regain his honour. It turns out that these Templars were all looking for an artefact named the Piece of Eden, and having found this as Altaïr, Desmond is pulled out of the Animus and sent for execution – Abstergo were the Templars all along!

### Synchronisation Report:

The original, but not the best, *Assassin's Creed* broke a lot of new ground, bringing the Holy Land to life with exceptional graphics for its day, and with the parkour and stealth assassination mechanics providing an experience unlike anything else on the market. And yet it's hella repetitive, with each of Altaïr's assassinations playing out in much the same way, countless information gathering quests that quickly get tedious, and some rather lengthy philosophical discussions that feel out of place in an action game. Nevertheless, *Assassin's Creed* set the template for what was to come...



## Assassin's Creed II (2009)

### Memory Sequence:

Desmond is rescued by Lucy, an Assassin undercover in Abstergo, and taken to a super-secret Assassin base. He's sent into the memories of Ezio Auditore da Firenze, another ancestor. Young, rich Ezio is happy shagging his way around Renaissance Italy until his family are murdered and he's forced to become an Assassin. Bugger. His quest for revenge leads him to the Templar Grand Master, aka Pope Alexander VI, who he beats the shit out of. Then he's contacted by Minerva, a representative from the alien First Civilisation (no, really), who sends a message to Desmond in the future that he must save the Earth from catastrophic disaster (no, really really).

### Synchronisation Report:

How this sequel dealt with the flaws of the first game would make or break Creed's chances as a franchise. It made it. With a much wider variety of quests playing out against the dynamic and detailed setting of Renaissance Italy, AC II was an instantly engaging game that, unlike its predecessor, didn't get boring, no matter how much time you put into seeking out every last collectible. Story-wise, Ezio's journey from petulant youth to mature Assassin gives us a much more in-depth character than Altair, plus the series cements where it's going with the whole Pieces of Eden arc.



## Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood (2010)

### Memory Sequence:

Desmond and the Assassins continue rooting through Ezio's memories in order to find the Apple of Eden, an artefact that will help them protect Earth. Now in charge of the Assassins, Ezio must rebuild the Assassin's Guild of Rome in order to take the city from his new Templar nemesis, Cesare Borgia. Eventually, Ezio kills Cesare and nabs the Apple from him. Having gained the location of the Apple from these memories, Desmond and co. go to find it, only for Desmond to be possessed by an alien, stab Lucy, and fall into a coma. Whoops.

### Synchronisation Report:

Hot on the heels of AC II's success, this one was approached with cynicism – carrying on with Ezio rather than taking us somewhere new, and restricting him to one city, it could have been a big let-down. And yet, though the story lacks the depth of the previous games, Brotherhood refines everything that worked about II's gameplay while pushing the series forward in a number of new directions. For the first time, there's the ability to command a legion of Assassins. Also for the first time, there's a multiplayer mode – one very much subsidiary to the single-player story but nevertheless addictive in its own right.



## Assassin's Creed: Revelations (2011)

### Memory Sequence:

In an effort to save him from the coma, Desmond's father places him back into the Animus to finish reliving the memories of Altaïr and Ezio. In his later life, Ezio travels to Constantinople to discover Altaïr's hidden secrets and becomes involved in a power struggle for the Sultanate. Further back in time, and following the events of the first game, Altaïr struggles to keep control of the Assassins. All this leads to yet another alien telling Desmond about a solar flare that's going to destroy Earth.

### Synchronisation Report:

Not offering much new in terms of gameplay, Revelations is more of the same – not that this was an issue, as the series had really found its feet by this point. Though the Constantinople setting lacks the vibrancy of the Italian cities we'd become used to, the story brings both Ezio and Altaïr's stories to a satisfying close, something that many game characters never get, while setting the path for the series to seek new horizons. The tower defence mini-game, however, is, well... it's not good.





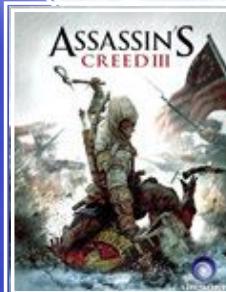
## Assassin's Creed III (2012)

### Memory Sequence:

Desmond and his Assassin mates go to the Temple of the First Civilisation, but the door's locked. To locate the key, Dezza must go into the memories of another ancestor, Ratonhnhaké:ton, aka Connor Kenway, a half-Mohawk who becomes an Assassin in Colonial America despite his father being the Templar Grand Master. Connor must turn against his dad in order to stop a Templar plot to overthrow George Washington. Desmond finds the key and stops the solar flare using some fancy alien tech, but dies in the process.

### Synchronisation Report:

Oh dear. Generally regarded as the low point of the series, this one replaces Ezio with a moody guy who's, frankly, a bit of an arse, and who happens to be at every key point of the American Revolution thanks to the painfully credibility-defying plot. Objectives are annoyingly linear, pacing is slow, and it's buggy as hell. On the plus side, it's a failure of ambition, and the addition of ship combat is an interesting idea that, while unrefined here, sets up for something much greater to come...



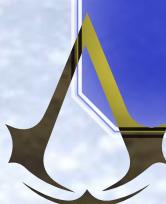
## Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag (2013)

### Memory Sequence:

Assassins of the Caribbean! A new, unnamed modern-day character is recruited by Abstergo to explore the memories of notorious pirate Edward Kenway, who happens to be Connor's grandfather. As Kenway helps Blackbeard and friends set up a pirate republic in Nassau, he also becomes an unwitting player in a Templar plot to find a First Civilisation structure known as the Observatory. Abstergo also want to know where this is, as our modern guy discovers. When Edward finds it, he's betrayed by the Templars and so becomes an Assassin.

### Synchronisation Report:

From the low point of the series to the high – *Black Flag* just gets everything right. The Caribbean is the series' biggest world yet, with plenty of towns and islands to explore and even more fun to be had on the high seas; the most daring shake-up of the formula yet, ship combat is simple to use but difficult to master, making it endlessly fun to sail around, taking on other vessels and constantly improving the *Jackdaw*. And Edward Kenway's story is perfectly judged, bringing in famous pirates like Blackbeard and Mary Read in order to provide both an exciting adventure and a detailed exploration of life in this place and time.



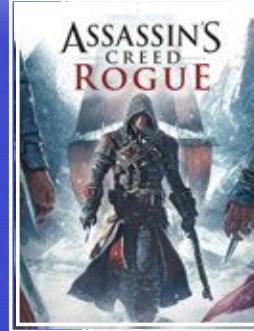
## Assassin's Creed: Rogue (2014)

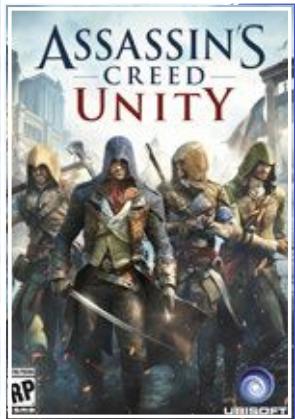
### Memory Sequence:

Another new modern character is sent into the memories of Shay Patrick Cormac, an Assassin-turned-Templar active during the Seven Years' War. Sent to retrieve several Pieces of Eden by the Assassins, Cormac realises that disturbing these artefacts is causing violent earthquakes, and so abandons his mission and joins the Templars. After all but wiping out the Colonial America branch of the Assassins, Cormac's search for the item which can find the Pieces eventually leads him to Versailles, and to a confrontation with French Assassin Charles Dorian.

### Synchronisation Report:

Just as *Revelations* did with *Brotherhood*, *Rogue* plays it too safe on the tails of *Black Flag*'s success, with barely any gameplay additions. The only new element comes thanks to Cormac's defection to the Templars, which allows us to fight against stealthy Assassin characters for the first time, and so adds some freshness to combat. The plot itself is somewhat predictable, but bridges *III* and *IV* neatly and thus completes the 'Kenway saga'. The series was once again ready to move on...





## Assassin's Creed: Unity (2014)

### Memory Sequence:

Abstergo has now gone into gaming, and the real-life player plays as a player of one of their games. Meta. Having been contacted via an Assassin recruiter, they explore the memories of Arno Dorian, son of Charles, the guy killed at the end of *Rogue*. Though the orphaned Arno is raised in Paris by Templar Grand Master De La Serre, he joins the ranks of the Assassins after De La Serre is murdered. On the trail of his adoptive father's killer, he discovers a grand Templar scheme that involves bringing about the French Revolution.

### Synchronisation Report:

You thought *Assassin's Creed III* was buggy? Players had so many problems with *Unity* on release that Ubisoft had to issue a formal apology. The technical issues were patched out, however, and the game beneath turned out to be not that bad. The first *Creed* instalment on current-gen consoles, its graphical overhaul means that revolutionary France looks stunning. Its changes to the assassination mechanics allow for some fun kills, and the co-op missions, while far from perfect, are an exciting addition.



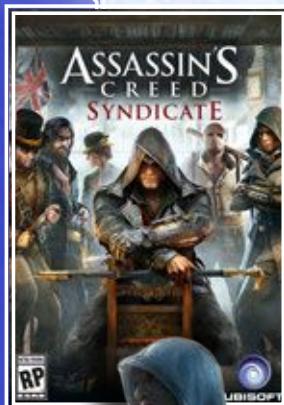
## Assassin's Creed: Syndicate (2015)

### Memory Sequence:

The same video game player, now an Assassin Initiate, is sent into the memories of twin Assassins Jacob and Evie Frye. As Jacob sets out to liberate Victorian London from Templar control, Evie is on the trail of the Shroud of Eden, a Piece that can make the wearer immortal. Eventually, the twins team up against Templar Grand Master Crawford Starick, who plans to use the Shroud to kill all of Britain's heads of church and state (we've heard worse ideas...). In the modern day, Desmond's old Assassin mates are also looking for this Shroud.

### Synchronisation Report:

By the ninth game in a series, players generally know what to expect; STARBURST's own review of *Syndicate* criticised it as 'very tedious' as 'we've done this same song and dance year after year for almost a decade now'. And yet, as an *Assassin's Creed* game and with all that entails, this is a solid instalment and a step up from *Unity*. While there are no major gameplay additions, the Victorian setting is brought to life with charm and vigour, and it's hard not to have fun as the likeable Jacob and Evie go on adventures with iconic figures such as Charles Dickens and Arthur Conan Doyle.



## Where Next?

While the *Assassin's Creed* series has indeed been ubiquitous over the last decade, you may have noticed that there hasn't been a release this year. This is because, after *Syndicate* had a slower release than expected in terms of sales, publishers Ubisoft decided to take a step back and put time into developing the game engines so that each new release can really push the series forward. Given that some instalments in the series have disappointed, often due to the factory line-esque speed at which they've been churned out, this seems like a wise decision.

However, the wide variety of potential settings the concept allows for means that Ubisoft shouldn't run out of ideas any time soon, and the release of the movie should bring more fans to the franchise, so it's worth watching our backs to see which new Assassins will be sneaking up on our consoles next.



We head into the stars with our preview of the hugely anticipated space drama PASSENGERS...

# HOMESTEAD

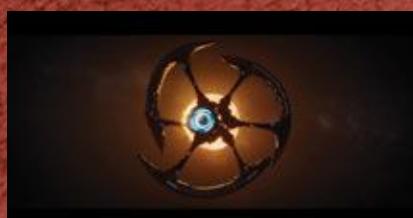
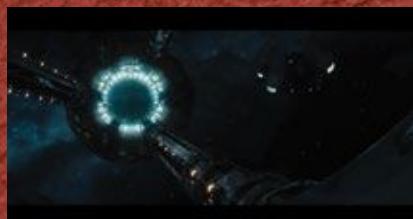
by Paul Mount

The success of Alfonso Cuarón's *Gravity* in 2014 – a space adventure film with few of the more fanciful trappings of the science fiction genre – appears to have opened Hollywood's eyes (and wallets) to the potential for films that ask a little more of their audience than that they sit passively gawping at empty spectacle and being patronised by mindless, by-the-numbers infantile storytelling. Last year's *The Martian* (a return to form for Ridley Scott) and Denis Villeneuve's *Arrival*, released earlier this month, were big, bold, high concept movies that, with one eye firmly turned towards the Academy Awards, dared to marry scripts that don't insult the intelligence of a reasonably well-adjusted five-year-old with A-List actors at the top of their game. They gave

us powerful, gritty narratives daring to ask questions a little darker and deeper than "Hey, isn't blowing all this stuff up just really cool?" Next to join this new breed of smart, thoughtful and – whisper it – adult sci-fi films is *Passengers*, directed by Morten Tyldum (*The Imitation Game*) and starring Chris Pratt and Jennifer Lawrence, both of whom are, by Hollywood standards, pretty much hotter than a supernova at the moment.

*Passengers* is set aboard the monolithic Starship Avalon, powering its way across the void of space with its cargo of over 5,000 human souls, sleeping in peaceful stasis for 120 years until the ship reaches its destination, the colony world 'Homestead II'. But the ship is still 90 years away from planetfall when two

of its sleep chambers inexplicably open. At first, mechanical engineer Jim Preston (Pratt) believes he's all alone in the huge, gleaming spaceship until he meets up with Aurora Dunn (Lawrence), a New York writer with a passion for space travel. The pair must come to terms with the fact that, with no way of returning to their cryogenic sleep, they have little choice but to live their lives out on the Avalon for better or worse; fortunately, the pair are played by two of Hollywood's foxiest young talents so it isn't long before the sparks start to fly and a curious intergalactic courting ritual born out of genuine mutual attraction rather than desperation and loneliness is set into motion. But it appears that all is not as it seems aboard the Avalon. The ship begins to develop a potentially catastrophic fault and perhaps



# BOUND

the malfunction that awoke the pair from their deep sleep wasn't quite as accidental as it first appeared...

*Passengers* is a project that is becoming increasingly rare in the 'play it safe' world of the Hollywood studio system. It's an entirely original script, written by Jon Spaihts, referred to as 'the go-to guy for space thrillers' when the *Passengers* script found its way onto the 2007 Black List of gold standard unproduced film scripts. It's fair to say that Spaihts' star is well and truly on the ascent; his name appears in some capacity or another on the credits of genre films as diverse as the witless alien invasion flick *The Darkest Hour*, Ridley Scott's *Alien* prequel *Prometheus* and even Marvel's latest offbeat superhero blockbuster *Doctor Strange*, plus he's written the script for the upcoming Tom Cruise-starring *Mummy* reboot, due out next summer. *Passengers* sat in development hell for several years before finding its way to Sony. There was even a brief period when Keanu Reeves and Reese Witherspoon were attached to what would have been a much lower-budget realisation of the project. Morten Tyldum was announced as the director early in 2015 and he was quick to point out that, whilst he was keen to helm a budget-busting space movie (*Passengers* cost around \$150 million to bring to the screen), he wanted to create a film that was as much about people as it was about spectacle – possibly even more so. "It's one of those stories that really grabs you and you fall in love with it," he said earlier this year. "It's very smart and funny and clever and such a page turner, I couldn't put it down. Every ten

pages, something new happens! At the same time, it's a very intimate movie while taking place on this epic scale. For me, it's a story about what's important to live a full life. What are the things we need as humans? It's not afraid to entertain but at the same time it asks big questions about what does it mean to really feel happy. Every generation has its love story. I feel like this is it. I had to do it."

Tyldum hit pay dirt with the casting of Pratt and Lawrence to play out this extraordinary love story set amongst the stars. In just two years, Pratt, previously best known for his role as slobbish Andy Dwyer in the long-running US sitcom *Parks and Recreation*, has established himself as one of Hollywood's most exciting new leading men thanks to the

smash hit success of *Jurassic World* and Marvel's *Guardians of the Galaxy* (whose sequel is due out next year) and the recent remake of *The Magnificent Seven*. Jennifer Lawrence shot to prominence in *The Hunger Games* but is also no stranger to genre fans thanks to her role as Mystique in the most recent *X-Men* trilogy; her more serious acting chops are evidenced by her role in David O Russell's quirky 2012 romantic comedy *Silver Linings Playbook*, which earned her a Best Actress Academy Award at the 2013 Oscar ceremony. Lawrence is now powerful and savvy enough to not only negotiate a higher upfront paycheque than her co-star but also a potentially whopping 30% share of the movie's profits once it's covered its initial production costs. Nice work if you can get it... But while *Passengers* will





ultimately stand or fall by the chemistry and charisma of its leading lights, it's not completely a two-hander, with the cast rounded out by Michael Sheen (in one of the more extraordinary and inhuman roles in his accomplished career) and veteran stars Laurence Fishburne and Andy Garcia.

Although *Passengers* entered production in Atlanta, Georgia in September 2015 – a punishing schedule that often involved long, arduous days for the two main stars – anticipation for the movie only started to build with the release of the first extended trailer back in September. Here we see a mix of spectacular visual effects as the Avalon hurtles through space, eye-poppingly cavernous sets that bring the ship's massive interior to the screen and hints of the relationship between Jim and Aurora as they are slowly drawn to one another and face the realisation that they are the only humans alive on the ship. Pratt displays his usual man-boy charm and Lawrence cuts a sophisticated figure as the two step up to the plate as the Avalon's Adam and Eve; but, of course, this isn't just a futuristic love story – there's danger and spectacle, too, as the ship starts to malfunction and the pair have to make difficult, if not impossible decisions, potentially for the sake of the future of the human race.

After a long summer of underpowered single-cell blockbusters and reboots, *Passengers* promises to be a breath of fresh air, not least because it's an original, all-new story, which comes with no preconceptions and expectations and offers audiences a story full of heart, soul

and spectacular adrenalised action. It's a film that appears to have the DNA of classics such as *Silent Running* and *2001* running through its veins with an unavoidable touch of *Titanic* (don't be alarmed) in its tale of two lovers drawn together by fate and who are, quite literally in this case, star-crossed. *Passengers* may share a lineage with *Gravity* and *The Martian* as it tells its story of the indestructible human spirit out amongst the stars and if it's even half as gripping and compelling as either of its two recent illustrious forebears, then *Passengers* is going to be a very welcome Christmas treat to brighten up the festive season.

*PASSENGERS* is released in the US on December 21st and in the UK on December 23rd.



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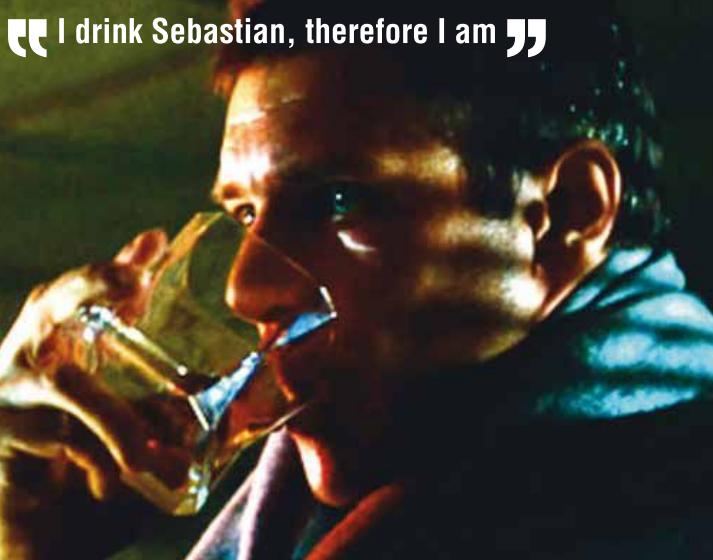
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# MORE HUMAN THAN HUMAN

by Robert Martin

It's hard to believe that the science fiction masterpiece *BLADE RUNNER* is now almost 35 years old. With a sequel finally in the offing, *STARBURST* takes a look back at what has made the film, initially a poorly received flop, a much loved and enduring classic...

#### **Great Scott**

*Blade Runner* was Scott's third film, coming after *The Duellists* (1977) and *Alien* (1979). A risky prospect for a director not wishing to be shoehorned into a particular genre, given the huge success of his 'haunted house in space' feature. It proved to be a difficult shoot and, as we all know, the film didn't achieve a successful box office or critical reception. And yet it confirmed Scott as one of the greatest visual directors of all time, something that would be reinforced with *Legend* (1985), his next film, another beautiful-looking flop, and in all of his films since.

#### **The Perfect Cast**

Harrison Ford starred in *Blade Runner* in the year between *Raiders of the Lost Ark* and *The Empire Strikes Back*. Deckard was a role that gave Ford the chance to break away from family-orientated films and, given that he's back aged 74 for the sequel, he clearly has let go of the well-documented horrors of *Blade Runner*'s infamous shoot. Sean Young may have had



Roy and Pris

Deckard calling Rachel on the videophone



a prolific output since, but she's never had a role as iconic as Rachel. Daryl Hannah's Pris is unforgettable – her death scene as harrowing as that of any human. But it's Rutger Hauer who steals the film from a great cast. His Roy Batty is one of cinema's finest creations, an AI questioning life itself, living the slogan 'more human than human' to become the most affecting character in the film. Hauer, Hannah, and Young never bettered their performances here.

#### **What a Dick**

Still the best example of Philip K. Dick's work on film, *Blade Runner* is an adaptation of his novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* It paved the way for other versions of Dick's work, including *Total Recall* (1990 and 2012), *A Scanner Darkly* (2006), *The Adjustment Bureau* (2011) and *Minority Report* (2002).

#### **That Music**

The score for *Blade Runner* is a thing of considerable beauty. Vangelis, fresh from his Oscar win for *Chariots of Fire*, produced a mix of audio that serves as a genuine soundtrack to the film, something that goes further than just a musical accompaniment to the visuals. Featuring voices as diverse as '70s songstress Mary Hopkin to the housewife's favourite Greek dish Demis Roussos, the synthesised instrumentation brilliantly evokes both the past and present, as befitting a film that blends futuristic design with retro chic. Lush and romantic, it took over a decade for the soundtrack to be released, despite Golden Globe and BAFTA nominations, and is now considered as much of a classic as the film itself.

#### **The Future Is Now**

Dystopian futures don't often come as convincing as *Blade Runner*'s did. But given that its version of LA in 2019 is now just a few years away, what did it get right and wrong? On the plus side, the film got overcrowded cities having to recycle disused buildings for accommodation right, and clearly pollution is a massive issue. Times Square these days looks just like *Blade Runner* only cleaner. Wildlife is on the decline (although domestic rearing of animals for meat is now the biggest threat to the climate that we have) but we're a

long way off from seeing major animal species from becoming extinct. Sadly, we don't yet have flying cars, replicants or the Voight-Kampff test to see if people are real, something much needed in the current political climate, but hey, when Deckard calls Rachel from the bar, that's just Facetime!

#### **Philosophical Futures**

At the heart of the film is the question 'what does it mean to be human?' The replicants, Batty, in particular, want the same answers we all do and, ultimately, it is Batty's refusal to allow Deckard to plunge to his death that reveals the humanity at the soul of these AI wonders. It's surely no mistake that all of the artificial humans are more vivid than their human counterparts, and only once Rachel realises that she isn't human does her real character shine through. Deckard? He spends his life living like a robot until that unicorn shows up in his dreams...

#### **A Thing of Beauty**

Rarely have cinematography, art direction, special effects, and soundtrack combined to create a film of such great beauty. The look of *Blade Runner* ravishes the viewer from the astonishing opening shot overlooking

the city of angels that looks like hell, right through to the final frame. But as you watch the film several times, its beauty lies in more than that; it's the intense characters striving for life forcing you to care.

#### **Reception and Legacy**

As we all know, *Blade Runner*, released on the same day as John Carpenter's *The Thing*, befell a fate similar to that other sf masterpiece. In competition with *E.T. the Extra Terrestrial*, both failed to register with the public and the critics, and took their time to garner the praise, fan base and the recognition they so richly deserved. Looking back, it's difficult to reconcile much of that reaction to the film we have today, in any of its versions. Accusations of *Blade Runner*'s plot being confusing seem exaggerated – it's not a hard film to follow – and besides, that's something beloved of classic film noir narrative. And yet the film managed to seep through into the collective conscious, thanks in part to the home video market, so new and space age at the time, as well as via the influence of the look of the movie on music videos, adverts, movies and so much more. It took its time, but *Blade Runner*'s status as a bona fide classic is so clear that it makes you wonder why it wasn't proclaimed such back then.

#### **Blade Runner 2049**

Produced by Scott, directed by Denis Villeneuve, starring Ryan Gosling, Robin Wright, Dave Bautista and, of course, Harrison Ford, the sequel 35 years in the making is certainly a gamble. It took a long time for *Blade Runner* to get the reputation it has today but the new film won't be following up on the stories of those beloved characters like Pris and Roy Batty. Even Rachel is absent from the character list so it's going to be a fascinating proposition to see just how Deckard has been doing these last 30-odd years. Who knows, maybe we'll finally find out if he's a replicant after all.

BLADE RUNNER 2049 is currently shooting and opens in the UK and US on October 6th.



Concept art for BLADE RUNNER 2



by Jack Bottomley

# WILD THING

**From the pages of the acclaimed novel comes A MONSTER CALLS, so we take a look at what to expect from this huge visitor come the New Year.**

Monsters have haunted literature for centuries, going back to the earliest stories told to children or as a cautionary tale to weary travellers. So it was natural that movies would come to inherit the monster and over the last century, cinema has done just that. However, in spite of the many years of Dracula stalking the shadows, werewolves prowling the moonlit countryside and a particular radioactive prehistoric lizard flattening the Tokyo cityscape, there have been certain 'monsters' whose motives and actions have

been far less dark or destructive, from the sweet and colourful community of *Monsters, Inc.* to Ron Perlman's big red in *Hellboy*. So it is that another well-intentioned creature comes a-calling in this much-anticipated adaptation of the acclaimed low fantasy novel *A Monster Calls*.

Originally beginning life as a concept by the late British writer Siobhan Dowd, *A Monster Calls* was a novel grounded in a very personal sense of tragedy, as Dowd was suffering from terminal cancer as she formulated the idea and sadly passed away before she could ever finish the book herself. However, Dowd arranged to write it alongside Walker Books editor Denise Johnstone-Burt, who saw to it that the book was completed and handed that duty to Patrick Ness (*Chaos Walking* trilogy). As Ness put it in his author's note of the novel, "She [Dowd] had the characters,

a premise, and a beginning. What she didn't have, unfortunately, was time". However, alongside illustrator Jim Kay, Ness and Johnstone-Burt's efforts proved beneficial, as *A Monster Calls* was released in 2011 to great acclaim, winning numerous accolades including Best Children's Book of the Year.

The basic concept of the book in many ways is a perfect reflection of its making, as the story sees a young bullied boy coping with his mother's terminal illness. That is, until a tree-like monster comes a-calling and shows him the way to confront the problems, changes and grief of life. Ness' story was the perfect tribute to the emotive early idea of Dowd; he crafted a stunning fable that integrated many real life issues into a part fantasy/part reality-based story. A tale of loss, loneliness and the strength of spirit, one could argue that *A Monster Calls* is the perfect groundwork for a cinematic offering. Boasting a tragic and yet powerful narrative, as well as emotively gripping characters and some darkly stirring fantasy elements, it was only a matter of time before Ness' monster called in at our local picture house.

But who would you task with bringing such subject matter to life on the big screen? Well, who better than Ness himself? In 2014, Focus Features scooped up the rights to this feature film adaptation and not long after, Patrick Ness was revealed to be writing the screenplay. This will be the author's first cinematic screenplay, although Ness





already has his *Doctor Who* spin-off *Class* to his name. Sometimes handing authors the keys to writing the movie versions has yielded splendid results (see *Gone Girl*) and the vigour and poignancy Ness displayed in taking Dowd's idea and completing it suggests that he ought to create an absorbingly assembled adaptation. However, there needs to be a captain for this vessel and those duties are going to the very interesting filmmaker that is J. A. Bayona. Soon to be wrangling dinosaurs in the (animal rights-based) 2018 sequel to *Jurassic World*, Juan Antonio Bayona is a director who knows a thing or two about helming a potent and gripping story.

Bayona is best known for directing the chilling 2007 Spanish language masterpiece *El Orfanato* (*The Orphanage*), exec produced by Guillermo del Toro. A film that in this writer's humble opinion is one of the best ghost stories of this generation, boasting spine-tingling atmosphere in place of cheap scares and a sublime and surprising story with a

shattering climactic punch. Bayona also directed 2012 disaster film *The Impossible*, based on the incredible true story of the María Belón family during the 2004 tsunami crisis. The film won the Barcelona-born filmmaker a degree of praise and some more accolades to go with the Goya award-winning *El Orfanato*. A director for whom the 'visionary' billing truly applies, Bayona is undoubtedly a superb choice for this adaptation.

What we've seen thus far looks to be in keeping with many of the heartbreakingly touching moments of the book, whilst also offering visually outstanding bursts of action, stemming from the central character's embrace of his own strength. The film, to expand on the earlier synopsis, sees 13-year-old Conor O'Malley (Lewis MacDougall) dealing with his beloved mother's (Felicity Jones) terminal illness, whilst also having to cope with the attacks of school bully Harry (James Melville). To make matters worse, Conor will have to move in with his cold and ornament-obsessed grandmother (Sigourney Weaver). However, at this low point in life, Conor receives a visitation from a huge tree monster (voiced by Liam Neeson), which has come to tell him tales and in the process help the young lad solve many of these problems.

At its core, this is a story about the difficulty of growing up and losing the cherished people in our lives, and Bayona is right at home handling this material. Arriving with hype, it is not hard to see why the many fans of the book and newcomers alike are excited, as this film comes with a heck of a pedigree from the big cast and crew to the artistic design of the film - stemming from the central character's love of drawing, a main point anchored in the trailers. The film occasionally looks like a living painting and has already won its fair share of positive reviews (a great 83% on Rotten Tomatoes at the time of writing), after being released in Spain and at festivals like the Toronto International Film Festival and the London Film Festival. No doubt this will have grander – more cinematic – moments than some of the nuances of the book but from the looks of this feature, it appears to have still kept the beating coming-of-age heart fully intact. So 'don't worry, tree happy', novel fans (too much?).



In addition to the embrace of themes and style, further substance looks to be offered by a fantastic cast, led by relative newcomer Lewis MacDougall (*Pan*). MacDougall is the roots vital to making this film flourish, with an initially fragile and worn down character (see the glimpses of his building anger and moments in which he watches videos of he and his mother's good times together), who becomes a man ahead of his years. However, his onscreen companionship with the brilliantly designed monster will be the crux of many elements, too. Liam Neeson once again lends his authoritative tones to a CGI character (à la the *Narnia* films), and despite possible treeish comparisons with *Guardians of the Galaxy*'s Groot and *Lord of the Rings'* Treebeard, this monster is very different. Looking to have character traits more akin to *The Iron Giant*, this 'monster' is the perfect mixture of supportive and scary, as Kay's penciled illustrations have been fully brought to life (and interestingly, cinema's latest friendly neighborhood Spider-Man, Tom Holland, was an on-set stand-in for the creature – this then being his second collaboration with Bayona after co-starring in *The Impossible*).

Aside from the leads, though, the supporting cast is equally promising, with Sigourney Weaver in the kind of

icy role for which she has previously shown prowess. Felicity Jones is harnessing her emotions as Conor's sick but resilient and loving mother. Then there is Toby Kebbell as Conor's distant father, who seems to be the film's harsher, if still somewhat understanding, parent. With other turns by James Melville as Conor's relentless tormentor Harry (who fans of the book know gets a receipt for his actions) and Geraldine Chaplin (*Doctor Zhivago*, *El Orfanato*) – also reteaming with Bayona – as the headteacher. To that point, Bayona is relying on other regular collaborators, Fernando Velázquez, to score the film and cinematographer Óscar Faura to make use of settings as diverse as the almost Gothic interiors to locations like Colne Valley High School in Huddersfield, Blackpool (all the rage it would seem after appearing in *Miss Peregrine's Home For Peculiar Children* this year), Preston, and Manchester.

This monster has taken a stroll across the fields, churchyards and some Spanish

locations to finally come knocking on the doors of UK cinemas. And after delivering the second biggest opening ever for a Spanish production in its home nation, in spite of bad weather at the time (trees thrive in rain!), what can we expect come the film's limited December and wide January release over here? All we know is that we cannot wait to see what this high-calibre cast and crew have done with such rich source material for a big screen production. And one thing we can all be certain of is that Siobhan Dowd would be proud of what her seed of an idea has branched out into.

*This monster will call on January 6th, 2017, so make sure you have the Miracle-Gro on tap!*





ALL THE NEWS  
FROM THE  
WORLDS OF  
STAR TREK  
WITH IAIN  
ROBERTSON

# SUBSPACE RELAY



## Bryan Fuller Boldly Goes

Bad news on the *Star Trek: Discovery* front, with the news that Bryan Fuller is taking a step back from his role as showrunner.

When Fuller was put in charge of the new series most fans, ourselves included, were ecstatic. Besides being the name behind shows such as *Hannibal*, *Pushing Daisies*, and *Dead Like Me*, Fuller cut his teeth on *Deep Space Nine* and *Voyager*, writing many popular episodes. He was widely seen as the perfect choice to bring *Trek* back to TV.

Now he's taking a reduced role on the show. Although he'll retain executive producer status, he'll no longer be directly running the show. That duty will fall to Trek newcomers Gretchen Berg & Aaron Harberts, who have previously worked with Fuller on *Pushing Daisies*. Fuller tweeted "Riker spent 7 years of TNG unready for Captaincy, @GretchenJBerg @AaronHarberts are ready. Thrilled to see them in command of the Bridge."

The official CBS statement on the replacement read "We are extremely happy with the creative direction of *Star Trek: Discovery* and the strong foundation that Bryan Fuller has helped us create for the series. Due to Bryan's other projects, he is no longer able to oversee the day-to-day of *Star Trek*, but he remains an executive producer, and will continue to map out the story arc for the entire season. Alex Kurtzman, co-creator and executive producer, along with Fuller's producing partners and long-time collaborators, Gretchen Berg and Aaron Harberts, will also continue to oversee the show with the existing writing and producing team. Bryan is a brilliant creative talent and passionate *Star Trek* fan, who has helped us chart an exciting course for the series. We are all committed to seeing this vision through and look forward to premiering *Star Trek: Discovery* this coming May 2017."

It's been reported that there's been friction behind the scenes between Fuller and CBS, primarily over the pace of production, with CBS already actively marketing a show that hasn't even entered production yet. There's also the small matter of casting. Whilst sources claim most roles are now cast, the lead role, which

isn't as yet (at time of writing), has proven trickier. This has led to further tensions between Fuller and the studio.

A few character details have also emerged, they include 'an openly gay actor as one of the male leads, a female admiral, a male Klingon captain, a male admiral, a male adviser and a British male doctor.' The Klingon captain is particularly intriguing considering at the period *Discovery*'s set, the Klingons and Federation are at each other's throats, and it's rumoured he'll be captain of a second ship, which will feature prominently in the series.

*Discovery* is still scheduled to begin production in November, and is set to premiere in May 2017.

## New World Record at DESTINATION STAR TREK

October's 50th anniversary convention in Birmingham saw the setting of a new world record. The convention broke the record for the largest gathering of people dressed as *Star Trek* characters, with 1,137 gathering on the main stage, beating the previous record - set in London in 2012 - by 70.

Amongst the attendees were some very impressive Borg, a Mugato, Orion slave girls, a pair of *Way to Eden* hippies, a hell of a lot of Starfleet officers, and one brave cosplayer as a Speedos-wearing Captain Picard.

Whilst it was the only record to be set at the convention, the Guinness Book of Records' Editor-in-Chief Craig Glenday was on hand to present awards for three other records. George Takei was presented with an award to celebrate the franchise becoming the most successful TV sci-fi franchise of all time (take that *Doctor Who!*) Craig then presented an award to Wil Wheaton marking *Trek*'s achievement as the world's longest-running video game franchise. The first ever *Trek* game was produced in 1971 by Mike Myfield, only two years after the Original Series finished.

Finally, and most bizarrely, William Shatner was presented with a certificate for the most expensive kidney stone. The actor sold his to an online casino in 2006 for a record-breaking \$25,000, which he donated to charity.

# A UNIVERSE OF INFORMATION

## President of the Federation

It's no secret that the outgoing President of the U.S.A. is a bit of a Trekkie, but when he recently guest-edited Wired, President Obama talked about his love of the show.

"I was a sucker for *Star Trek* when I was a kid. They were always fun to watch. What made the show lasting was it wasn't actually about technology. It was about values and relationships. Which is why it didn't matter that the special effects were kind of cheesy and bad, right? They'd land on a planet and there are all these papier-mâché boulders. But it didn't matter because it was really talking about a notion of a common humanity and a confidence in our ability to solve problems."

"*Star Trek*, like any good story, says that we're all complicated, and we've all got a little bit of Spock and a little bit of Kirk, and a little bit of Scotty, maybe some Klingon in us, right? But that is what I mean about figuring it out. Part of figuring it out is being able to work across barriers and differences. There's a certain faith in rationality, tempered by some humility. Which is true of the best art and true of the best science. The sense that we possess these incredible minds that we should use, and we're still just scratching the surface, but we shouldn't get too cocky. We should remind ourselves that there's a lot of stuff we don't know."

During the interview, the President also talked about his admiration for Ridley Scott's *The Martian*, as well as dropping in a reference to *The Matrix*. President Obama's long been open about his love of sci-fi. He's hosted the likes of Nichelle Nichols and R2D2 at the White House, and lists *Star Wars*, *2001*, *Blade Runner* and *Close Encounters* amongst his favourite films, which in our view, makes him the best President ever. Sir, if you find yourself at a loose end after January, there's always a job going for you at STARBURST HQ.

## From Paris to DISCOVERY

There wasn't much in the way of juicy gossip to come out of *Destination Star Trek*, but Robert Duncan McNeill did let slip that it's possible he'll be directing *Discovery*.

The former Tom Paris-turned-director was asked during a Q&A if he'd be interested in working on the show. McNeill replied that if the show had stuck to its original production schedule, he'd have been otherwise occupied, but since the debut had now been pushed back to May, it was a possibility. Without going into many details, he did let slip that he was privy to inside information on the show, which would imply that they've been in contact with them.

It's be no surprise if he did direct. Besides directing many episodes of *Voyager* and *Enterprise*, he's a well-established TV director, having worked on the likes of *Dawson's Creek*, *The O.C.*, *V*, *Supernatural*, *Desperate Housewives*, and *Chuck*, where he rose to the role of executive producer.

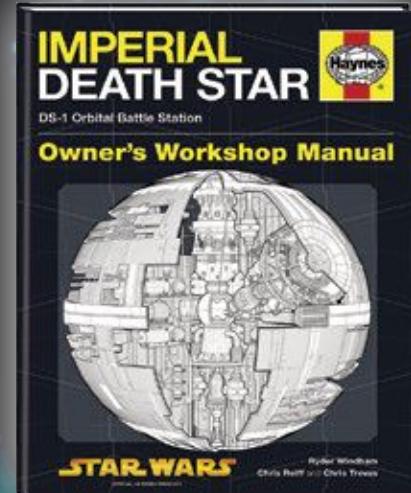
## DS9 Documentary to Behr All

For much of its run, Ira Steven Behr was executive producer and showrunner of *Deep Space Nine*, and successfully guided it to become the greatest *Trek* show of them all (yes, we said it). And now he's returning to the world of *DS9*, producing a documentary about the show.

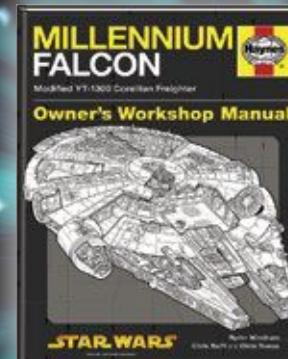
As well as telling the story of *DS9*, Behr claims the purpose of the film is to look at the show's influence and meaning. It was certainly influential. *DS9* helped usher in the modern serialised approach to genre shows, ditching the traditional story-of-the-week format favoured by many of its contemporaries. It also, unusually for its day, featured a huge cast, rather than the three or four primary cast members favoured by most contemporary genre shows. Whilst modern audiences used to the likes of *Game of Thrones* might take these for granted, this was ground-breaking stuff back in the early '90s.

Behr's talked to most of the cast for the film, with the notable exception of the famously elusive Avery Brooks. He also, intriguingly, reassembled the show's key writing staff, and tasked them with breaking the story for the (non-existent) Season Eight.

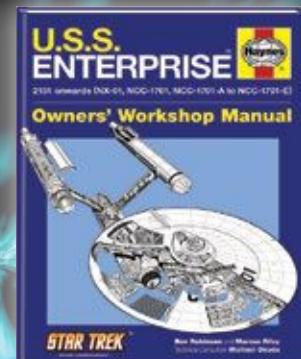
The currently untitled documentary is being edited at present, and is due for release sometime in 2017.



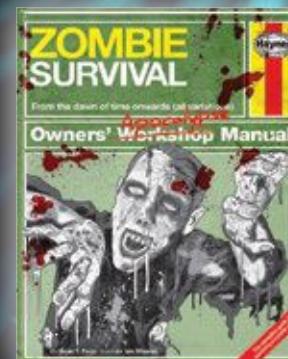
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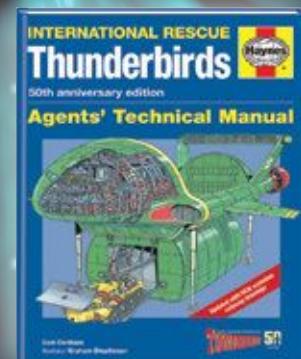
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rely largely on your tolerance for all things Shatner (for the record, we loved it).

Rounding off day two was the second of two parties, featuring a 50th birthday cake - cut by Walter Koenig - and the musical stylings of *Trek*'s own Rat Pack - Armin Shimerman, Casey Biggs, Vaughn Armstrong, Jeffrey Combs, and Max Grodénchik.

The final day started on a high, with a Next Gen reunion of Marina Sirtis, Gates McFadden and Wil Wheaton. They were followed on the main stage by William Shatner - talking *Trek* this time - whilst an entertaining panel on the movies took place on the Voyager stage, featuring Sirtis, Alice Krige, and Christopher Lloyd.

A panel entitled *50 Years Not Out* saw the likes of Chase Masterson, Jeffrey Combs, and Apollo 15 astronaut Colonel Al Worden discussing the show's influence whilst Greg Grunberg repeatedly plugged his very worthwhile epilepsy charity ([talkaboutit.org](http://talkaboutit.org), if you're interested).

They were followed by Walter Koenig, who riffed on how Khan and Chekov recognised each other in *Star Trek II*, spoke out against CBS's crackdown on fan films, and resolutely refused to say 'nuclear vessels'.

A scheduling clash meant Original Series fans were torn between Koenig and a panel discussing the upcoming *Roddenberry Vault* Blu-ray, which features never-before-seen footage from the series. The entertaining Voyager panel (Garrett Wang, Robert Duncan McNeill, and Martha Hackett) that followed also overlapped with the convention's final main stage panel, featuring Koenig and Takei.

Minor quibbles regarding queueing and scheduling aside, though (not to mention the alarming rate that money disappeared from your wallet), *Destination Star Trek* was a hugely enjoyable affair. The NEC's a slightly impersonal venue for events like this, and the cavernous exhibition hall occasionally felt somewhat sparse, despite the thousands of fans and variety of exhibits. Interesting side note: the Horse of the Year show was being held next door, resulting in lots of very confused looks from horsey people. It may also explain why horse enthusiast Shatner kept disappearing from the convention floor. It's not often that this many of the show's stars gather together in this country, which alone was worth the price of admission. It was also one hell of a 50th birthday party for - with apologies to assorted Jedi and Time Lords - the best damn sci-fi franchise on the planet.



WORDS : IAIN ROBERTSON

## DESTINATION STAR TREK EUROPE Birmingham NEC October 7th - 9th, 2016

**B**irmingham's NEC wouldn't necessarily seem like the logical place to celebrate the 50th birthday of *Star Trek*, but it played host to a memorable, not to mention record-setting event. Since its début in 2012, *Destination Star Trek* has become the largest, most impressive *Trek* convention in Europe, and this year's was no exception. Over thirty guests from all incarnations of *Trek* turned out to celebrate the anniversary, along with thousands of fans.

It all kicked off on Friday, October 7th in a leisurely fashion. The lack of panels on the opening day meant visitors were free to explore stalls, have their picture taken on either the original or *Next Generation* bridges, or spend their life savings on autographs and photoshoots. These activities varied in price from the very reasonable to William-Shatner-on-the-Enterprise-Bridge expensive. Also popular was the European premiere of the frankly brilliant '50 Artists. 50 Years' exhibition, featuring a diverse collection of specially commissioned *Trek*-themed art, including a submission from STARBURST's own cover artist Mark Reihill.

Aside from the main talks, the convention's three stages - Enterprise, Voyager and Excelsior - offered a variety of interesting events throughout the weekend, from talks on props, *Trek* novels, comics, and merchandise to the more bizarre. These included the Red Shirt fight-off - where fans competed to be killed in the most entertaining fashion - and a Shatner-themed karaoke, which had to be heard to be believed.

The highlight of the first day was the opening ceremony on the main Enterprise stage, featuring brief appearances from the majority of the guests. The lively ceremony was hosted by *Trek* newcomer Greg Grunberg, who along with *Voyager*'s Garrett Wang hosted many of the panels.

Unfortunately, the opening day was marred by some poor organisation, with early arrivals queuing for a couple of hours to register, and similar problems for both

the opening ceremony and the following party. Fortunately, us British are just as adept at dealing with queues as Picard (see what we did there?) and the following two days were a lot slicker.

Saturday morning, the air turned blue courtesy of both Dominic Keating and Terry Farrell. Keating was joined for a very entertaining, sweary *Enterprise* panel by Connor Trinneer and Vaughn Armstrong. Farrell had three panels throughout the day, with Nicole de Boer, and Robert O'Reilly (in full Gowron costume) as well as the *DS9* panel, alongside Alexander Siddig, Armin Shimerman, and Max Grodénchik. Farrell was also one of the surprise hits of the convention, with her brutal honesty about being let go from *Deep Space Nine* one of the more moving onstage moments of the weekend.

Saturday also saw popular talks from Wil Wheaton, in his only convention of the year, along with George Takei and Adam Nimoy, who gave audiences a look into his documentary *For the Love of Spock*. The day also saw a new world record for the largest gathering of people dressed as *Star Trek* characters, with 1,137 gathering on the main stage, beating the record set at the London event four years ago.

Saturday night saw the captain himself take the stage, with the first European performance of his one-man show, *Shatner's World*. The two-hour presentation sees William Shatner take audiences on a whistle-stop tour through his life and career, via anecdotes, film clips and - yes - song. Like the man himself, it's frequently hilarious, occasionally self-indulgent, one-of-a-kind, and your enjoyment of it will



# DESTINATION STAR TREK EUROPE

## COSPLAY

We had a far out time at DSTE - here's a selection of some of the great cosplay we saw over the weekend!





From the  
desk of the  
STARBURST  
Trekologist  
B. JONES

# THE TREKOLOGIST



## DS9, Tribbles and Comedy - A 30th Anniversary Delight

**G**reetings from the hub of Trekdom. Currently running on CBS Action are episodes of third season original *Star Trek* and fifth season *Deep Space Nine*.

Season Five is the beginning of the main Dominion/Cardassian war story arc that was postponed in Season Four to introduce Worf and the Klingon back into the DS9 universe. Whilst Season Five's story arc has some major battle sequences it also has one of the most memorable funny stories too.

*Trials and Tribble-ations* was created to celebrate the 30th anniversary of *Star Trek*. That seems a long time ago now that we are celebrating the 50th anniversary! The best thing about this episode, however, is the comedy. The storylines in this show are not known for it and to see a laugh out loud episode is a welcome relief from the ever increasing doom and gloom in everyday 24th century life aboard a space station.

This episode introduces us to the temporal investigation team. A duo who don't seem to see the funny side in anything – especially time jokes. Characters Dulmurr and Luccsy, are anagrams of Mulder and Scully - the paranormal investigators of *The X-Files*. Whilst listening to the story that Sisko tells, Dulmurr tells him he wants 'the truth', while Luccsy is mostly skeptical about elements of the story.

Whilst returning a sacred Orb to Bajor, Sisko and the Defiant crew travel back in time to the 23rd. These Orbs produce instant temporal displacement and are very handy as they avoid complex mathematics and having to slingshot around the sun. The Defiant materialises at Deep Space Station K7 just as the Enterprise NCC-1701 and the Klingons arrive in the Original Series episode *The Trouble with Tribbles*.

To follow the villain aboard the space station, Sisko decides that they should beam aboard too disguised as starship crewman of that era. Which means you get Sisko in a garish yellow shirt, Bashir and O'Brien get slicked down hair and best of all, Dax in a mini skirt – and yes, the spots do go all the way down!

This is the beginning of a selection of superb shots merging the two crews together via the wonder of modern visual effects that won an Emmy Award nomination. Some of the fantastic crossover scenes include: O'Brien in the famous crew line-up when Kirk asks who started the fight; Sisko getting to meet Kirk on the bridge and finally finding out why Kirk wanted that hatch to be closed when he is waist deep in Tribbles.

There are just so many references that the fan can revel in from the original episode. The villain Arne Darvin is played by the original actor Charlie Brill. The original episode writer David Gerrold gets a walk on as the grey haired chap holding a Tribble in the corridor as the Enterprise goes to red alert and in the last scene when DS9 is infested with Tribbles, we see a miserable and silent Quark at his bar covered in them. He even has one on his flat head mirroring the scene in the original series.

When you can see the love and detailing on the recreation of the original sets, the duplication in lighting and shooting of the show as if it were the sixties and the wonder of those brilliant visual effects to merge the characters seamlessly you know that people who make this show love it as much as we do.

Keep on Trekkin'



# HERE'S TO THE ONES THAT DREAM ...

BY TOMMY JAMES



Old Hollywood collides with modern day Los Angeles as Emma Stone and Ryan Gosling reunite in this all singing, all dancing love affair set to take the Oscars by storm...

*City of stars, are you shining just for me?  
City of stars, there's so much that I can't see,  
Is this the start, of something wonderful and new?  
Or one more dream that I cannot make true...*

So laments the husky singing voice of Ryan Gosling in the first teaser for Damien Chazelle's jazz-inspired ode to Los Angeles, a picture destined to become an instant classic that unashamedly harkens back to the lost Golden Age of musicals and firmly injects contemporary, cynical reality with a dose of sunny optimism inspired by classics like *Singin' in the Rain*.

Emma Stone finds the perfect outlet for her incomparable brand of relatable bright-eyed charm as Mia, an aspiring actress who serves coffee to movie stars while drifting from one unsuccessful audition to the next. One day, when stuck in traffic, Mia becomes distracted as she's running lines and fails to notice the light turn green, causing a

scowling fellow motorist to angrily overtake her. This is Seb (Gosling), a disenchanted and lonely jazz musician, bitter at a world that refuses to allow him the big break he needs in order to transcend his passion for jazz into a paying, respectable career.

To get by, Seb plays as part of a house band in a dingy downtown bar. One night, he differs from the planned set list and veers off into a beautifully improvised jazz sequence, earning Mia's attention but costing him his job as he is fired by the club manager (J. K. Simmons, reuniting with *Whiplash* director Chazelle). It's not quite love at first sight, but after a few false starts, Seb and Mia fall in love and begin a relationship that plays out against the backdrop of winter, spring, summer, and autumn.

Fuelled by the throes of young love, Mia and Seb encourage each other to pursue their passions no matter what. Before long, Mia becomes the star of her own one-woman play and Seb fulfils

his ambitions as the owner of a hip jazz club. But, success comes at a price, and the fulfilment of their dreams forces an unforeseen pressure on their relationship that threatens to tear them apart.

It's the kind of story that's been told before, but not through song and dance, and not through rose-tinted glasses. *La La Land* might be a nickname for Los Angeles, and, in particular, Hollywood, but it's also a way to describe an alternate reality. A dream world, of sorts, where modern romantics blissfully fantasise of a life of stardom, except here the dream is merged with real life, and it's the movie's sheer tone of *hopefulness* that's got critics talking.

Ironic, perhaps, then that the timing of the film's release coincides with the impending departure from public life of the man who brought the phrase 'the audacity of hope' to mainstream attention. 'Hope' is the key theme here. Hope in its purest form. Unfiltered. Unabashed. But, this earnestness raises the question - can a film that tumbles



between fantasy and real-life strike a chord with an audience who live in a world that glorifies social media, a 24-hour news cycle, and television networks dedicated solely to the brutality of reality television?

Based on the reception so far, the answer seems to be yes. *La La Land* opened this year's Venice Film Festival to universal critical acclaim. It continued to garner a positive reception at numerous advance screenings, with reviewers singling out the performances of Stone and Gosling for particular praise.

Awards season is just kicking off but already Stone (fresh from a Best Supporting Actress Oscar nomination for last year's *Birdman*) has proved herself the darling of the festival circuit, scoring the Volpi Cup for Best Actress in Venice. Gosling looks set to add a fifth Golden Globe nod to his résumé and all signs indicate both stars should keep the month of February free in their calendar for the upcoming Oscars season.

It's notoriously difficult to predict the

success that musical motion pictures will have at the box office. Over the last fifteen years, films like *Chicago*, *Les Misérables* and *Into the Woods* have grossed well against their budgets, but these productions were originally stage adaptations and benefited from name-recognition, although a built-in fanbase is no guarantee of success.

Clint Eastwood's *Jersey Boys* failed to translate a successful decade on Broadway into significant box office returns, and other contemporary musicals like *The Last Five Years* sank without a trace despite the appeal of Anna Kendrick's name at the top of the call sheet. The *Pitch Perfect* franchise found an audience in no small part due to its inventive use of popular mainstream music and a young, likeable cast. Based on these examples, history would indicate that a modern-day jazz musical might struggle to attract a wider audience.

Fortunately for *La La Land*, it boasts two of the most popular and engaging leads

in recent cinematic history. The chemistry between Stone and Gosling is consistently electrifying, and far from untested.

In addition to *Gangster Squad*, both stars arguably broke through to mainstream attention after stealing the show in 2011's Steve Carell vehicle *Crazy Stupid Love*. The infamous scene in which Stone – nervously contemplating her first one night stand – boldly demands that Gosling remove his shirt only for him to reveal a perfectly honed six-pack, prompting her to exclaim "Seriously? It's like you're Photoshopped!" continues to spawn memes across social media five years after the film was released.

Early indications suggest their dynamic is as captivating as ever, and whilst their chemistry may not have yet achieved the iconic status of vintage collaborators like, say, Bogart and Bacall, Gosling's brooding intensity and Stone's knee-slapping moxie are as close as you'll get to seeing Marlon Brandon and Doris



Day share the same screen.

So what about the music? Not much has been released so far, but both trailers featuring Gosling's *City of Stars* or Stone's *Audition* (sample lyrics: 'here's to the ones that dream, foolish as they may seem') are available on Spotify, which would suggest that they are a good representation of the kind of ditty we can expect. That being said, Chazelle has reenlisted his *Whiplash* composer (and former Harvard classmate) Justin Hurwitz and we know there are numerous extended dance scenes, so it's highly likely there are some up-tempo numbers just waiting to be unleashed as the promotional tour continues.

From what we've seen, Gosling and Stone make perfectly convincing, if not exactly powerhouse, vocalists in their first foray into the land of musicals, though time will tell where their performance will rank amongst the likes of Fred and Ginger (whilst not technically singing, check out Stone's rendition of DJ Khaled's *All I Do*

*is Win* on Jimmy Fallon's Lip Sync Battle, a performance which should allay any concerns about Stone's stage presence when given a beat she can get into).

In many ways, it feels like *La La Land* is being presented as a love letter intended for multiple recipients. The first is Los Angeles itself. Whilst regularly used as a setting for film and television shows, it's hard to think of an example when the City of Angels has lived up to its romantic moniker more than through the lens of Chazelle and his cinematographer Linus Sandgren (*American Hustle*). Images released so far (Gosling in rolled up pinstripe sleeves, Stone in a fifties-cut yellow dress) show the pair dancing under a dusky sunset in such a way that could trick you into thinking this was a love story playing out under the Parisian skyline, not the home of the Bloods and Crips.

The second recipient is 2016. The refreshing message of the film seeks to ask

its audience to forget the world we live in now, the fractious political landscapes and the plight of the bumblebee, and instead asks us to think 'what if' we lived in a time that included the technological and social advancements we have now, and yet somehow managed to retain the yearning of hope of those trying to 'make it', instead of the pessimism from those who believe they either already have or never will.

With a running time of a little over two hours, there's plenty of time for the ethos of the film to find its target. As Christmas draws closer and older movies work their way onto the television schedule, it's almost inevitable that during a viewing of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* someone will wistfully sigh 'they don't make them like this anymore'. Turns out they do, and this film may strike just the right note of retro-nostalgia at just the right time. ♦

*LA LA LAND* is released in the US on December 16th and the UK on January 13th, 2017.





by Charlie Oughton

# KATE SHENTON

**This month, we catch up with a director fresh from her second highly successful screening at FrightFest, with her first feature-length narrative film...**



#### **STARBURST: What is *Egomaniac* about?**

Kate Shenton: *Egomaniac* is the story of a young female filmmaker who is determined to make a zombie horror romantic comedy but everyone in the industry keeps telling her to put a talking dog in the film in order to raise the finance. She keeps compromising more and more until she learns the hard way that too much compromise can kill.

The film is a semi-autobiography based on many of my personal experiences in the film industry. It's very fictionalised and I will never say what is fact and what is fiction, but the more surreal it gets, the closest to the bone it is. It's a very dark comedy with a horror twist at the end and was made with a lot of blood, sweat, tears and love.

**The film had its World Premiere at this year's FrightFest. What has the reaction been like?**

The reaction has been incredibly positive. You never really know what people are going to think of the film until you screen it in front of an audience, particularly when it's a comedy. I don't think we could have asked for a better World Premiere and the support for the film has really blown me away.

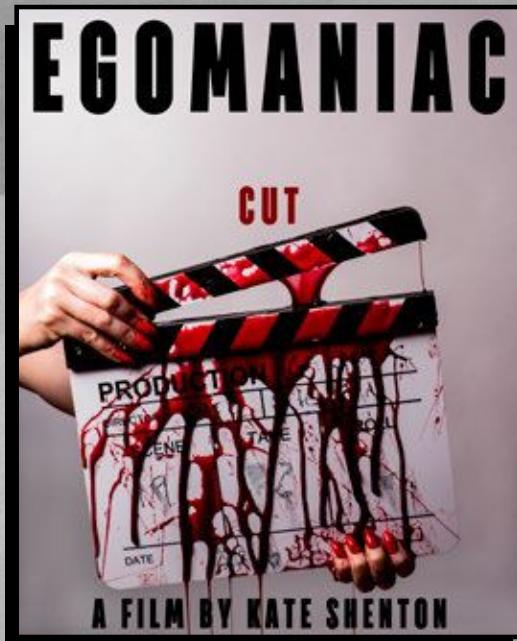
**How would you like audiences such as film fans and industry insiders to react to *Egomaniac*?**

Hopefully, it will resonate with a lot of people, but I kind of also want it to be a celebration of the whole 'fuck it, I'm just going to do it' attitude. This is a very exciting time. You can just get a camera and go and make a film. It is very much a celebration of no-budget filmmaking.

**FrightFest nominated you for the Screen International Horror Rising Star Award and you earned an Honourable Mention (congratulations!). How did that impact on you and your work?**

It's had a huge impact. I was really surprised when I heard I was nominated for the award, mainly because of just how good the nomination list was. Filmmaking involves a huge amount of rejection and

## EGOMANIAC



sometimes it's easy to forget how far you've come from when you first started. Being nominated for an award like that really does make the tough times worth it and I'm incredibly grateful to FrightFest for putting me forward for the nomination. I also want to say huge congratulations to Alice Lowe for her well-deserved win.

**It is sometimes said that directors make short films in order to break into making features. You made your short, *Send in the Clowns*, after your body-suspension documentary, *On Tender Hooks*. Will you continue to make shorts and if so, why?**

I think I will always make short films from time to time. For me, short films are an excellent place to experiment. It's a good way to test out a new idea or a new approach. Also, it's just fun to make short films! I made *Send in the Clowns* before *Egomaniac* because I wanted to test run some of the low-budget techniques that I was planning to use and it was definitely a massive help in learning from our mistakes and feeling more prepared to make a feature film. There are fewer consequences in making mistakes in short films than there are if you're making mistakes in features. Therefore,

I think it's best to test run something in a short before jumping into a feature - particularly if you're breaking away from your comfort zone.

### What's your next project?

The next film is *Bloody Burrito*, which I'm working with the wonderful Breakneck Films on. It's about cannibal waitresses in a Mexican restaurant and it's shaping up to be super fun. We're pulling together an amazing creative team. We can't wait to get started. We've also partnered with Crypt TV UK for *Egomaniac* and I'm super excited about the work that they're producing and how we're releasing *Egomaniac*. It's a tremendously fun collaboration.

**Your recent work has often had a strong vein of dark comedy. How do you see yourself developing as a filmmaker? Do you try to increase precision of emotion, aim for variation on the 'darkly comic' theme or do something else entirely?**

I think each project that you make needs to be different from the last. *Send in the Clowns* (about a man who likes to dress as a scary clown) and *Egomaniac* are very much dark comedies. However, *Bloody*

*Burrito* is much more of a horror comedy. I'm also developing a couple of projects that are just horror films and I would like to do projects outside of the genre as well. The only way that you can develop is to constantly make sure that each project you do slightly scares you. This is how you know you're doing something challenging and therefore something that is worth doing. I do not want to remake the same film over and over again. It's only by constantly striving to make something different that you can keep things exciting and engaging.

### Who are the creative team for *Bloody Burrito*?

It's been an incredible experience working with the wonderful Breakneck Films. Until now, I have been producing my own work and working on a low-to-no budget scale. With Breakneck Films' guidance, experience and ambition, *Bloody Burrito* has really been pushed to the next level. It's a step up for me as a director, but they're holding my hand every step of the way and I'm truly excited to make this film with them.

**Breakneck Films are also working on one of your short films. Will you be involved in the process and (either way) why?**



Breakneck Films are producing the short and the wonderful animator Sprankenstein will be bringing it to life. I am very much taking a back seat on this one. This is the first time I've written something that someone else will be directing, so I'm very excited to see how they interpret the script. It is a super fun story and one which would fit perfectly with animation. It's also super exciting to see someone so talented bring their own style to a story. I'm very much looking forward to seeing it when it is completed.

**You currently work in London but are originally from Stoke. How is it best for people who want to become involved in the industry to network and why?**

It's an industry of collaboration and collaborations involve people. Therefore it is important to meet and get to know as many people as possible. I think networking in person is essential. It's not just about meeting people but it's also about making sure that the people that you're setting up partnerships with are people that you generally like. I think that is one of the most essential things. Making a film is hard work and getting a film out there is even harder. You have to make a lot of difficult decisions

and those decisions are easier to make if you enjoy working with the people that are involved in your project. I think that often in networking, people are trying to find that person who is going to be their big break. For me, I'm trying to find people who I like and want to work with.

**In terms of finding people you want to work with and the central message of *Egomaniac* that people should be equal, what kind of environment do you like to create on film sets?**

I'm a very collaborative director and I aim to create a very equal film set. You're in a hugely creative environment surrounded by creative people. The challenge of the director is not to tell people what to do but to listen to everybody within each department and push everybody to work to the vision of what a film should be. I think the film is like a cake; all the different departments are ingredients and the director is the sieve. You know how much flour should go into the cake and you add that amount or it won't make sense.

**Considering egomaniacal directors, how much is personal branding an issue in terms**

**of promoting your work and working with other people within the industry?**

Sadly, branding is an issue whether you are someone who brands themselves as 'yes, I'm a director' or not. You are always conscious of it. Social media is incredibly powerful. There are so many filmmakers out there that you do have to stand out. I think the most important thing is to stand out on your own terms. You can attract attention anyway, but I think the best way to do that is to be yourself. I think we're getting into a time where people are curious about who is behind the camera. The experiences of *Egomaniac* are a lesson that mean, you know what? Do it your way. You have to choose the route you're empowered by.

**What do you class as the worst ways to promote yourself?**

I think that the worst way to promote yourself is to forget that social media is social media. And that everyone can see it. I have noticed a few social media profiles of people who have been blurting out their sob stories. It isn't therapy. If your social media is a professional social one then it's probably best that you don't have a fall out with anyone in a personal capacity on it.



I think Twitter is a place where you can really connect with an audience, because there's so much reach. I think that is the most powerful tool for an independent filmmaker, because you want to just reach out to people. Often you make a film and the people who want to see your film don't get an opportunity to see it because how do they even know it exists? That's why social media is so powerful. It lets people know what content is available.

**How can audiences support indie filmmaking?**

I think the biggest single thing you can do is not illegally download independent films. A lot of pain and a lot of love goes into those films and the people who make those films do need to be able to pay back their investors. Most people who make indie films don't expect their first few to be able to make a profit but they would like to pay their investors back so their investors want and dare to invest in that filmmaker's films again.

**Filmmakers often indicate the supposed reaction to their films by putting the garlands of the film festivals their work has played at on their promotional materials. How important is it to submit to, and have your films shown at, film festivals in order to get the garlands?**

I absolutely love film festivals and they are an amazing way to get a film to an audience. I've always been very lucky in that I have been able to get my films into festivals, but if that isn't working for you and your film isn't getting accepted then you need to find another way. At the end of the day, everyone gets rejected. For every bit of success I've had, I've had a hundred rejections. You just have to brush it off and find a different route. Some of the best things that happened to me have come because of rejection. It has pushed me into doing things in a different way.

**Is there anything else you'd like to mention?**

I just want to say thank you to everyone who has supported *Egomaniac*. We have already been on such an incredible adventure with the film and I am very excited about the adventures to come.

I would also like to say a massive thank you to Crypt TV UK for all their support of *Egomaniac* and all the incredible marketing they've done. I think without their support we would have really struggled to have gained the attention for the film and with their help, we have - particularly on social media. Social media is a difficult nut to crack so it's been fantastic getting guidance in building up the accounts. They will also be supporting my next film, *Bloody Burrito*, as well.

*Find out more about Kate at [kateshenton.com](http://kateshenton.com).*





## REVIEW:

## EGOMANIAC

**CERT: TBC / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: KATE SHENTON / STARRING: NIC LAMONT, ADAM RHYS-DAVIS, LAURENCE R. HARVEY, DAN PALMER, LOREN O'BRIEN / RELEASE DATE: TBC**

Catherine's sitting in the chair opposite, facing the camera. She's leaning forward slightly, features seemingly stretched, manic eyes trying to hide her desperation. There's an octopus sticking out of the coffee shop's cash register behind her. The guy she's with – him with the clueless smile – is trying to work out how far he can push her before she realises she'll be making her zombie romantic comedy on her own regardless of the compromises she agrees to along the way. Kate Shenton's *Egomaniac* follows the story of this determined indie director and in doing so marries some very unnerving home truths about the film industry with a surrealism that underscores its point about what is in fact pottily plausible in this so-called profession.

Shenton wrote and directed this film based partly on her own experiences as an indie director. As such, the film is partly a biting satire (that's not really a satire) and partly a gleefully desperate reflection of the frustrations of the indie filmmaking process – especially for women in a genre with a strong vein of sexualisation. We see the main character, Catherine, pout and pose and get used and abused financially, emotionally and physically by characters that are deluded, shady and downright sadistic until she finally snaps. As a result, while it is often utterly barking mad, the film never loses its authenticity despite familiar-face cult film cameos popping up who could otherwise (conversely) derail its realism. We've all seen these personality types lurking in the corners of genre cons.

*Egomaniac*'s talent is to throw the audience off-kilter, and it does this with some genius casting decisions. The key one is the Egomaniac herself, Catherine Sweeney (Nic Lamont). Though a naturally glamorous actress, Lamont conveys Catherine's awkward determination wonderfully. She immerses herself in the role no matter how unflattering it is either visually or in terms of likeability and a sequence on a sofa is gently harrowing to watch. Paradoxically, the other one to watch out for is none other than Laurence 'Human Centipede 2' Harvey. *Egomaniac* shows just what a fine physical actor he is, but not in the way you'd expect. His tics are downright brilliant. The other players are aided by some truly inspired sets, some in the most normal of places.

Shenton, however, deserves special mention. She pulls the feat of not only directing a clear-headed and entertaining story (even considering the madness at its heart), but also by using various point of view techniques, she minimises problems such as the inexperienced actors and location issues that otherwise dog zero-budget productions. Eric Elick's score gives the final product a glorious, in-your-face gloss.

The true irony is that *Egomaniac* shows just how good a director the experience of banging her head against a brick wall has forced Shenton to become. She's no one's puppet. Watch your bottoms, dodgy film industry folks – this gleefully vicious egomaniac has bite.





# LISTENING TO THE AVENGERS

by Tony Jones



**BIG FINISH** has taken the classic TV series and given it a new lease of life, adapting lost episodes and now the fondly-remembered comic strips. We find out what we can expect from the second volume...

**B**ack in 1961, ABC Television began broadcasting a spy-fi series called *The Avengers*, focusing on the adventures of Dr David Keel (Ian Hendry) and his mysterious government agent John Steed (Patrick Macnee). After the first series, the show's emphasis moved to Steed and his many female assistants. In the late 1970s, the show was revived as *The New Avengers*, with Steed once more the focus.

Back to those original episodes, and like many other series all the videotapes were wiped, and all that remains is three stories on 16mm recordings. That situation remained unchanged until 2014...

When Big Finish announced they would be bringing back the original

*Avengers* on audio, it was one of those ideas obvious once somebody else has thought of it. The stories were unfamiliar to many, but even then the casting was fascinating; in six box sets (so far), Anthony Howell (Keel) and Julian Wadham (Steed) have impressed and entertained in equal measure. Fans quickly wondered what next? Would Big Finish carry on with later series? Would Cathy Gale, Emma Peel, Tara King or even Purdey and Gambit be coming to audio? Would Big Finish be allowed to write some original stories still set in that first Keel and Steed season?

Those questions remain unanswered. However, this year we have been treated to adaptations of a set of Steed and



Mrs Peel comic strips that were first published in *Diana* magazine in 1966–67. This also gave us an answer – Olivia Poulet is Emma Peel. We caught up with writer Paul Morris to discuss his work on the series. First, he explained it was co-writer Simon Barnard who'd been the big fan of the show: "Simon has been a big fan as long as I've known him, and I think you can see that in almost everything he writes. I must admit, though, that I hadn't seen *The Avengers* in any form before the BBC4 repeats of the Mrs Peel-era about ten years ago. After that, I pretty much worked my way backwards, ending with the Big Finish adaptations of the Dr Keel episodes. I was always intrigued by how the series shifted so much in tone in such a relatively short time, and going through those changes in reverse just made it even stranger. I recommend it!"

The first box sets were all adaptations of TV scripts, whereas *Diana* being a comic strip presented a different challenge. It turns out that wasn't a problem: "Neither of us have worked with comic strips before – unless you count Simon's adaptation of the first Scarifyers [a set of stories produced by Paul and Simon and released by Cosmic Hobo, now known as Bafflegab] story into a comic book, but that was going the other direction! To be honest, the fact that we were adapting a comic strip wasn't all that important. We were simply using the storyline as the starting point for our script, so it wasn't that different from being given a detailed brief by a script editor, or one of us enlarging on a sketchy outline from the other. What was helpful was that the illustrations were vivid enough to give us a sense of the stories' atmosphere – always a good starting point."

With only a short run of comic strips available, there will be only two sets of adaptations. This again raises the

question of original stories. Paul is very keen on this idea (and not just the Mrs Peel era), as he explains: "We'd be very keen to work on any more Avengers that Big Finish can throw at us, whether it's original stories or more adaptations, and whichever team they like. Everyone involved thought it was a crying shame that our new Steed and Mrs Peel might

not get any outings beyond these eight Diana adaptations, though. It felt like we were just getting started. *The New Avengers* would be an interesting dynamic. Updating our style to give it a seventies feel could be fun!"

Julian Wadham has been playing Steed for Big Finish for some time, whereas Olivia Poulet is a more recent recruit. Paul was in the studio for the recording of one of their stories [*The Atomiser*] and noticed the dynamic between Wadham and Poulet: "One thing I was particularly impressed by was how seemingly effortless their interaction was. They slipped seamlessly into the rhythm of the dialogue, often nailing it on the first take. If there are no more Steed and Peel adventures to come, the end of that double-act might be the greatest loss of all."

Let's hope that's not the case and fans continue to enjoy the pairing of Steed and Peel as they recreate the 1960s. Paul offers the following thoughts as to why they remain so popular: "The Avengers always existed slightly outside any single, easily definable genre. But I think there's something timeless about the Steed and Peeler in particular that means its appeal never fades. The Swinging Sixties trappings are just superficial; what gives it its heart is the fact that our two heroes enjoy their work, and that enjoyment is infectious."

The second (and final) set is available in November. If it's up to the standard of the first it should be a hit. +

JULIAN WADHAM AND OLIVIA POULET IN

# THE AVENGERS

STEED AND MRS PEEL

PLAYTIME IS OVER

BY ROBERT KHAN AND TOM SALINSKY

# REVIEWS

THE LATEST BIG SCREEN GENRE RELEASES REVIEWED AND RATED



## DOCTOR STRANGE

CERT: 12A / DIRECTOR: SCOTT DERRICKSON / SCREENPLAY: SCOTT DERRICKSON, C. ROBERT CARGILL, JON SPAIHTS / STARRING: BENEDICT CUMBERBATCH, TILDA SWINTON, CHIWETEL EJIOFOR, MADS MIKKELSEN, RACHEL MCADAMS, BENEDICT WONG / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

With the copious amount of comic book characters leaping from page to screen nowadays, it really does take a great deal of effort to do something different, something unique, something (you know where we are going here)... strange. Well, in conjuring up a film adaptation of Steve Ditko's magical maestro Doctor Stephen Strange, Marvel Studios really has had quite a task on their hands. A product of the '60s mind (altering) set, Doctor Strange is a character that must have been a challenge to do justice to onscreen (see some racial stereotypes of the era in the source material). The spiritual mythos and magical elements of the character are a change of pace for the MCU and the production of this film has certainly raised eyebrows. With accusations of whitewashing the cast (the Ancient One is portrayed by a white English woman) and some unsure about the casting of the good Doctor himself, as well as the appointment of (until now) horror genre director Scott Derrickson (*Sinister*), people were keen to see the results. Well, rest easy fans, Marvel has delivered... again.

The film centres on brilliant but egotistical neurosurgeon ace Stephen Strange (Benedict Cumberbatch), who is left with nerve damage in his hands after a near fatal car crash. Desperate to regain his steady hand and thus his career, and after various failures with medicine, he is directed to the Tibetan community of Kamar-Taj to a group who may be able to help, with the use of "alternative" treatments. However,

this group, led by the Ancient One (Tilda Swinton), has more to offer than healing remedies, as Strange is challenged to unlock his true potential by opening his mind to the impossible. In many ways, Doctor Strange is the typical Marvel formula but with pepperings of fresher elements. This origin story certainly draws from the rulebook heavily, with the plot structure working out like clockwork at times. True, this studio formula is growing overly familiar but Derrickson's film is bolstered by a superb central performance and grand-scaled ingenuity in its action.

Like Iron Man, this is a film energised by the hero it is introducing; the screen-absorbing appeal of this new face in the MCU makes the film work, in spite of the familiarity of its narrative rhythm and the weakness of its villainous component (a common issue across Marvel's movieverse). Cumberbatch's casting may have worried some but he is in his element here and is simply sublime as the initially self-centred and egomaniacal genius (not far removed from his turn as Holmes in BBC's *Sherlock*). Doctor Strange is a joy every time he is on screen and Cumberbatch captures the essence of the character's intrigue, intellect, dimension-bending power and big screen-friendly enchantment. In fact, this may be Marvel's most enigmatic movie character since Robert Downey Jr. started as Tony Stark.

The supporting cast is also effective, with Chiwetel Ejiofor being a strong

accomplice as fellow sorcerer Karl Mordo (though fans will know things are going to get more interesting there in the future), Benedict Wong being very entertaining as straight-faced protector of the mythic scripture Wong (eschewing the character's problematic comic book presentation) and – in spite of the controversy – Tilda Swinton is great as the Ancient One. Rachel McAdams is underused (in a similar manner to Natalie Portman in *Thor*) as Strange's co-surgeon-come-romantic interest Christine Palmer and while Mads Mikkelsen exudes menace (as he does so easily), his villain Kaecilius is pretty ordinary, as is the big bad we meet in the film's effects-filled finale, which borders on falling prey to third act syndrome but recovers it nicely.

However, in spite of the film's few missteps, it never ceases to be an entertaining origin movie, focused on introducing this character rather than building up the universe (minus the film's two absolutely brilliant post-credits scenes). This constant entertainment is, of course, down to the potential brilliance of the title character but is also credited to some stunning kaleidoscopic action sequences that recall *Inception* and feel like the result of what would have happened had Christopher Nolan taken LSD while making that film. From the start, this set piece - packed caper is stunningly realised and these perfectly rendered sequences of magic and cinematographic parlor tricks are the film's ace in the hole. As is a beautiful score by Michael Giacchino, who at times hits on Indian-sounding psychedelic riffs and meshes them with Queen-like guitar work (the end credits track is simply divine).

Doctor Strange is a treat for the eyes and ears for sure and is a rare film that makes good use of big screen 3D. It is not flawless but you'll be carried along for the whole 115 minutes and enjoy the landscape-folding, cape-swirling and spell-casting ride. The formula may be getting well worn, but now that we know how Strange became "Master of the Mystic Arts" and embraced his power, the real fun can begin; on this evidence, Benedict Cumberbatch is a future scene stealer in this world of Hulks, raccoons and demigods. Doctor Strange is another enjoyable offering in the MCU.

JACK BOTTOMLEY

EXPECTED ★★★★★★ 8

ACTUAL ★★★★★★ 8



## WE ARE THE FLESH

CERT: 18 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: EMILIANO ROCHA MINTER / STARRING: NOÉ HERNÁNDEZ, MARÍA EVOLI, DIEGO GAMALIEL, GABINO RODRIGUEZ, MARÍA CID / RELEASE DATE: NOVEMBER 18TH

Recently, while reviewing the utterly bizarre *Mecanix*, we suggested that Canada was historically the best bet for anyone in search of extreme filmmaking. Perhaps we should have said Mexico, because the new wave of weirdness flowing from that quarter is seriously challenging for the crown. You might want to pour yourself a stiff drink before embarking on *We Are The Flesh* because it pushes limits most mainstream movies won't go near. But for all the death and depravity it delivers, there's a creative

passion at play that makes for compelling cinema.

A teenage brother and sister stumble across a derelict building occupied by a grizzled old artist with a serious hygiene problem. Despite this, the two wastrels swiftly fall under his spell, entranced by his Mephistophelean manner. Initially, they assist him with an art project to convert his grime-encrusted flat into what looks like an alien cave set from *Space: 1999*. But before long, things take a dark turn and he has them eating

human flesh (supplied via a mysterious Lynchian serving hatch), indulging in incestuous sex, doing all manner of things with bodily excretions and cannibalising a passing soldier. All unpaid work, of course, although anyone who ever interned with Damien Hirst or Tracy Emin won't be in the least bit surprised by any of the above.

First-time director/writer Emiliano Rocha Minter's script is slight, but might best be experienced as a descent into a playfully Mexican version of Hieronymus Bosch's *The Garden of Earthly Delights*. As the transformative shenanigans of the movie progress, the single-apartment location moves from a colour-drained Tarkovsky-styled dump into warmly-lit otherworld, courtesy of some excellent design and cinematography. Classical music, the Mexican National Anthem and a discordant soundscape align behind the performances and visuals to seal a very particular kind of deal.

Minter is helped by a cast for whom the term 'dedicated' is probably an understatement. No matter how unhinged your

set-up, you still need strong performances - we call it the 'Jack Nance Test' - and all three main players pass with distinction. Front and centre as the demonic perved piper, lead actor Noé Hernández seems to be channelling Terry Gilliam's stock-in-trade madman from *Monty Python* before a third act transformation into a reborn, clean-shaven version of the same character. It's a boggle-eyed marvel of a performance; you completely buy this charismatic lunatic's power to coerce and entrance his young disciples. He is the living spirit of rebellion, an agent of chaos so fiendish he'd frighten most Middle Englishers down a rabbit hole. The campaign to get this as a free DVD giveaway with the Mail On Sunday starts here.

*We Are The Flesh* is a bizarrely arresting treat from an exciting new talent. It's also just about the strangest film you'll see this year. Why dip your toes in the pool when you can swan dive with a double twist?

MICHAEL COLDWELL

EXPECTED ++++++ 6

ACTUAL ++++ 8



## OUIJA: ORIGIN OF EVIL

CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: MIKE FLANAGAN / SCREENPLAY: MIKE FLANAGAN, JEFF HOWARD / STARRING: ANNALISE BASSO, ELIZABETH REASER, LULU WILSON, HENRY THOMAS / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

*Ouija: Origin of Evil* is the prequel to 2014's *Ouija* and tells the story of that movie's antagonist Doris. Alice Zander is a mother of two who, with the aid of her children, uses parlour tricks to convince people they are contacting their loved ones. One day, Alice brings home an Ouija board to use for her act and it is discovered that her younger daughter Doris really can communicate with the dead. Alex puts Doris to work as a medium, but doesn't see the damage this does to her.

The central strength of *Ouija: Origin of Evil* is the clear and sympathetic motivation of Alice as a character. In the beginning when her claims of putting people in touch with their relatives are false she believes that she is doing good work, because she gives them closure. This is mirrored in her own desire for closure due to the death of her husband before the events of the movie. This need for closure means that it is only natural when the movie depicts her as being unaware of the

danger she is placing Doris in, and the warning signs that Doris' gift isn't all that it appears to be.

This loss underpins the actions of the character throughout the film and gives *Ouija: Origin of Evil* an air of tragedy. All of the performances are strong in this regard but the strongest is Lulu Wilson as Doris Zander. Wilson plays Doris' transformation from innocent child to movie antagonist perfectly. When she first starts using the Ouija board, she exudes a calm that makes it feel like she is in complete control of the situation and this really adds to the otherworldly nature her character takes on by the end of the film. Thanks to Wilson's performance, the change from innocent child to an inhuman being of malice and rage is a gradual one that the other characters and audience don't realise until it is too late.

Sadly, the actual horror in the movie isn't always as strong as the characters or their motivation. The supposed rules of the board are mentioned but we never see one of them actually enforced, so a later broken rule has less impact.

Early attempts at horror come across as unintentional comedy rather than anything genuinely scary. A scene in which Doris uses her powers against two bullies is clearly supposed to be dramatic and terrifying but is just really funny. When your horror movie has you rooting for the demon ghost girl, you are usually doing something wrong.

This isn't a problem that lasts and by the third act the movie has realised its true potential. The nature of the spirits that ultimately plague the family is simple, and avoids convolution. Like the Zanders' grief, the spirits' anger boils down to a simple, believable reason that makes them all the more menacing.

*Ouija: Origin of Evil* has an uneven start but ends on a high note thanks to strong characters and a plot that wisely invests its focus in the struggles that inform their actions. It explores questions left by its predecessor without feeling restricted by it.

GARETH EVANS

EXPECTED ++++++ 7

ACTUAL ++++ 8

# REVIEWS

THE LATEST HOME  
VIDEO RELEASES  
REVIEWED AND RATED



## THE HERSCHELL GORDON LEWIS FEAST

DVD + BD / CERT: 18 / DIRECTOR: HERSCHELL GORDON LEWIS / SCREENPLAY: VARIOUS / STARRING: VARIOUS / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Great timing Mr Lewis, as always. Just as Arrow Video completes work on this everything-and-the-fake-eyeball magnum opus box set of his work, the maestro of marketing goes and dies. Result: maximum publicity and interest. Of course, we'd much prefer the great man to still be around to expound the brilliance of this final manoeuvre in that inimitable drawl, but he's genially present throughout these 17 discs in the form of commentaries, specially shot introductions, and a wealth of archive materials lovingly curated for our disgusted delight.

Taken as a whole, Herschell Gordon Lewis's adventures in the screen trade represent a remarkably committed middle finger to the Hollywood system. His trademark palate of one-note acting, resolutely un-looped dialogue (you'll be thankful for the subtitles here), single-shot coverage and lugubrious astro jazz soundtracks may be seen as charming today but his mission statement was anything but; here are films designed to shock and disturb, to give you nightmares and, for all that, keep you coming back for more of the same. This set includes 14 of his works, in dual format, looking just about as good as can be given that the Smithsonian is unlikely to ever request that the original negatives of Lewis's films be immortalised for posterity alongside

those of Spielberg, Lean and Scorsese. In fact, some of these prints still have some gloriously scratchy sections, belying their authentic heritage as censor-baiting cinematic contraband.

Blood Feast (1963), the film that inspired a thousand splatter-fests since, remains a bizarrely bracing template, but it's far from the best of the Lewis line. In all the 'gore' series that followed, be it the banjo-Brigadoon mayhem of Two Thousand Maniacs (1964), the ridiculous lunacy of The Gruesome Twosome (1967) or the fiendish stagecraft of The Wizard of Gore (1970), Lewis constantly outdid himself, pushing his voyeuristic format as far as his blood-hungry Southern state audiences demanded. You have to wait until 1972's The Gore Gore Girls, a deliberate attempt to bookmark his decade of filmic degradation with a flourish before moving onto more lucrative pursuits, to find Lewis genuinely breaking his own mould. Starring Frank Kress as effete private investigator Abraham Gentry, heavily channelling UK export Jason King, and Amy Farrell as his Emma Peel-alike sidekick, it's a refreshing shot in the arm that leaves you wanting more. Alas, this engaging mix of giallo, The Avengers and extreme eyeball violence was the end of the Lewis line. Shame, that.

But Lewis was far more than just 'The Godfather of Gore', as the six non-

splatter features here ably demonstrate. They're a very mixed bag; the 'roughie' sexual predator warning of 1963's shot-in-six-days Scum of the Earth and 1964's hillbilly throwdown Moonshine Mountain might prove a bit of a slog even for connoisseurs. But by the time Lewis got around to his take on the biker gang flick with 1968's She-Devils on Wheels, he was jumping from bandwagon to bandwagon as entertainingly as Roger Corman, if not as slickly. For our money, the best of these (relatively) non-gory sideshows is 1967's Something Weird, which mixes a woozy late-60s cocktail of LSD, witchcraft, the occult and serial killings into a be-careful-what-you-wish-for parable for the modern man. It also sports the crown jewel of Lewis soundtracks. All spacy bleeps and jazzy parps, it's an atonal masterpiece.

The extras here are pretty damn great. A hell of a lot of work has clearly gone into producing a giant gutbucket of new features and scholarly dissections from fans, filmmakers and former collaborators. With no stone left unturned, you'll be lost in them for weeks. Also included is Frank Henenlotter's feature-length Godfather of Gore documentary from 2010, although UK viewers may be just as pleased to re-acquaint themselves with Jonathan Ross's excellent Incredibly Strange Film Show episode from 1988 that really kick-started interest in Lewis on this side of the pond. If you're feeling bold and go for the super deluxe 'Shock and Gore' edition of this set, you also get a barf bag, the Blood Feast score on vinyl and, almost inevitably, an "individually handmade super-gory eyeball". Talk about lovingly toolled.

If exploitation is your bag, Herschell Gordon Lewis wrote the book on it (and a few other subjects, besides). This is a richly rewarding tribute and the ultimate celebration of a truly pioneering body of work. Bloody good show, old man.

**Extras:** Brand New Introductions to the films by Lewis / Hours of extras including newly produced Interviews and Featurettes, Commentaries and Short Films / Additional Bonus DVD: Herschell Gordon Lewis - The Godfather of Gore Documentary / Exclusive Books, Vinyl and Eyeball

MICHAEL COLDWELL





## ONE MILLION YEARS B.C. (1966)

DUAL / CERT: PG / DIRECTOR: DON CHAFFEY / SCREENPLAY: MICHAEL CARRERAS / STARRING: RAEQUAL WELCH, JOHN RICHARDSON, PERCY HERBERT, ROBERT BROWN, MARTINE BESWICK / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

If you've never seen *One Million Years B.C.* (restored here in 4K), you're probably at least familiar with Pierre Luigi's iconic photograph of young star Raquel Welch in her 'costume'. Those of you who are sticklers for scientific and historical accuracy might not want to delve too much further than that, for this Hammer hit is almost the definition of

ahistorical. The plot, such as it is, focuses on the plight of tribesman Tumak, played by John Richardson. After fighting with his dad over a juicy piece of meat (it's never about the meat, though, is it kids?), Tumak is banished to the hot desert - actually Lanzarote and Tenerife in the Canary Islands. Here he will come into contact with giant lizards, spiders,

dinosaurs (that a-history, folks) and the many dangers present when a young caveman finds himself out alone in the world.

It's not all bad, as he's noticed by Loana (Welch) of the advanced Shell tribe. After they save his life, he is taken in by them. Eventually, he'll make his way back to his own people, leading to two tribes actually going to war. Well, kind of. It's not really about the plot though. Made in 1966 when Hammer were riding almost at their highest, some things make *One Million Years B.C.* stand apart from the handful of dinosaur/prehistoric movies Hammer would make later on.

Firstly, due to their distribution deal with 20th Century Fox, they secured the services of the up-and-coming Welch in the lead. Seven Arts financing helped pay for the location shooting. It also helped pay for the special effects work of Ray Harryhausen, and this is the biggest thing that makes the film stand out. Director Don Chaffey had worked with Ray just a few years before on the classic *Jason and the Argonauts*. Their pairing

would prove profitable again when working for Hammer, as this turned out to be a box-office success.

You could imagine viewing this through a modern filter might diminish its eccentric charms, but happily that's not the case. The cast have a ball playing at being prehistoric, and it's tightly directed by Chaffey, who also understands how to present scale on a relatively low budget. It's helped immeasurably by the sterling work of Harryhausen, and his special magic elevates the action sequences just as you would expect.

Extras are limited to two new interviews (one with the ever-enthusiastic Welch) and a stills gallery of Harryhausen's prep work. However, if you're a fan of Hammer or Harryhausen, then this comes highly recommended. For those with a more casual interest in fantasy films, we still consider this worthwhile as it's a huge amount of fun.

JAMES EVANS



## KNIGHT RIDER: THE COMPLETE COLLECTION

BD / CERT: 12 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: VARIOUS / STARRING: DAVID HASSELHOFF, EDWARD MULHARE, RICHARD BASEHART, PATRICIA MCPHERSON / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

After over thirty years, *Knight Rider*, the cult classic TV series with David Hasselhoff and his mechanical sidekick KITT, is getting the Blu-ray treatment. *STARBURST* took a trip back to our childhoods to see if it still stands up...

Knight Rider sees Michael Long, a police detective, shot

in the face and left for dead whilst on assignment. Saved by plastic surgery and a new identity, Michael Knight (Hasselhoff) is recruited into the Foundation for Law and Government (FLAG), led by Devon Miles (Mulhare) and assisted by Bonnie Barstow (McPherson), who equips

Knight with KITT, a Pontiac Firebird Trans-Am with artificial intelligence (as voiced by William Daniels). And so begins a unique crime-fighting duo that spawned four series, a revival series and a host of other media.

The Blu-ray format works incredibly well for *Knight Rider*, as it does an excellent job of giving the series a nice remastering, which keeps the '80s retro charm without adding any unnecessary CGI, something that has spoilt other re-releases of classic film and TV series in recent years. Meanwhile, the box set comes complete with a variety of goodies in the way of extras, including select episode commentary from the Hoff himself and Glen A. Larson (the mastermind behind the series), a photo gallery, blueprints gallery and other general 'making of...' sections (or is that under the hood sections? Ahem...).

Meanwhile, as for the series itself, it's pure unadulterated escapism. Long before his singing career and the tongue-in-cheek

persona he has adopted in the last few years, you see what made David Hasselhoff an appealing part of the series in the first place: he's charming and witty as well as threatening when he wants to be. It makes you realise that such a series just wouldn't have worked without someone like him. Also, you get to see the early appearances (and voices) of performers such as Geena Davis, Jason Bateman, Peter Cullen, and Robert Englund. What may put off some viewers is the nature of each episode being more or less self-contained; with the exception of a few two-part stories, the fact that every story is resolved within forty-five minutes may not appeal to more modern audiences who expect a certain level of story-arc with their series.

However, with this affectionate remastering, the extras and the Hoff in his prime, *Knight Rider* is too hard to resist.

NICK BLACKSHAW





## KICKBOXER: VENGEANCE

DVD + BD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: JOHN STOCKWELL / SCREENPLAY: DIMITRI LOGOTHETIS, JIM MCGRATH / STARRING: ALAIN MOUSSI, JEAN-CLAUDE VAN DAMME, DAVE BAUTISTA, DARREN SHAHLAVI, GINA CORANO / RELEASE DATE: DECEMBER 5TH

As Hollywood continues to remake some of the most popular and iconic films of all time, it seems only fair that some of the average ones receive the same treatment. As such, we have Kickboxer: Vengeance, a film no one probably wanted, but we're getting anyway.

In the 1980s, Jean-Claude

Van Damme made a raft of cheesy Bruce Lee rip-offs whose success was based entirely on the actor's physical charisma and awkward yet charming style. Bloodsport was undoubtedly the high water mark, and proved a perfect platform for Van Damme's swaggering skills. Now, too old to take the lead in

a Kickboxer remake, he becomes the trainer to a new Kurt Sloane (Moussi) – think Creed but with less plotting.

To avenge the death of his brother at the hands of Thai behemoth Tong Po (a wasted Dave Bautista), Kurt must learn from the fedora-sporting Van Damme, and channel a new fighting ethos. The training montage itself is the highlight of the film, with plenty of nods to the latter's filmography while showcasing Moussi's martial arts abilities. Sadly, there is little else to distinguish Kickboxer: Vengeance from any other straight-to-VOD revenge thriller that you might find nestling in the dark corners of Netflix.

Van Damme has never been the strongest of performers but his screen presence has always carried him through. Here, he is Oscar-worthy in comparison to a supporting cast that stutters and stumbles along like first year drama students. Moussi does his best in what is an early role, and has enough likeability to suggest this could be the start of a decent, if low-key, career for him. Gina Carano is miscast as a shadowy fight promoter and Bautista barely utters a word in a role that he clearly signed on

for prior to becoming the star he is now.

What should impress in a film with this title are the fight scenes, but disappointingly, they all feel a little bland. This was evidently a tight shooting schedule, and you get the distinct impression the fights have been crudely constructed in the editing room. Quick cuts and inconsistencies are rife as conflicts become weary repetitive.

If you're a Van Damme fan or a lover of 1980s martial arts films, there is some nostalgic fun to be had, and whatever your personal opinion on Van Damme, he is undeniably a captivating performer. There isn't anything offensively wrong with Kickboxer: Vengeance, there's just not enough right for it to be more than a Friday night fix upon returning from the pub with a takeaway. And however successful this one may prove to be, Kickboxer: Retaliation is on the way; and that will feature both Mike Tyson and Ronaldinho!

JOHN TOWNSEND



## ARCADIA

DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: TOM LARGE / STARRING: MARC BAYLIS, RUFUS WRIGHT, AKIE KOTABE, JOSEPH BAKER / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

It's the end of civilisation as we know it (twice), and boy is it bleak. Bleak viewing, that is. Anybody expecting thrills and drama and indeed any kind of excitement would be better off renting Andy Warhol's Empire instead.

Ignore the promotional images, because Tom Large's latest film is once again being sold as a sci-fi thriller, a tech-heavy one, and once again it's nothing of the

sort. There are a couple or three nice FX shots intended to set the scene, but the rest of it is basically maybe half a dozen interminably lengthy scenes. The only light in the entire film is the big bright neon signposting the shock revelation at the end – somewhere we've been before, many many times. Arcadia makes THX 1138 look breakneck, Soylent Green look cheerful, and 1984

look positively Disneyesque.

So, the plot. It's the near-ish future, and with the population suffering from an apparent terminal cocktail of diseases that has brought the age expectancy down below forty, Charlie (Coronation Street's Marc Baylis) is signed up for Guardian duties, as part of a programme that promises to see him and his family admitted into Arcadia, the tall building wherein the wealthy and the auspicious are given 'the cure' and can live segregated from the infected masses outside. Except Charlie's latest assignment, after six years of accruing points and losing a wife, leads to him discovering the real reason nobody lives past the age of 39 these days. You can probably guess why. Charlie is tasked with babysitting the one man who has stopped medicating and lived to try and tell his tale ( Baker), but Charlie's handler (Kotabe) and the Prime Minister (Wright) are about to make things very complicated.

With so much of the film taken up by reacting to off-stage stimuli, it's little wonder the performances

are as subdued – and for subdued, read stilted – as they are, with much of the actors' work lacking in conviction. But Large's direction appears to fetishise the muted quality; so much so that the photography is as dull as the acting, the washed-out greyscale giving Arcadia the sheen of a VHS tape that's been left out in changeable weather for a few too many weeks.

The real problem, however, is that no care is taken to make us care about anyone or anything that happens. There are just a number of vaguely motivated people running through a number of would-be interesting situations, and while Arcadia seems to want to address a variety of issues, the cost of medicine, for example, most of the filmmaking decisions – such as having a totalitarian Tony Blair as Prime Minister – only undermine anything it might have to say. Tedious and depressing.

**Extras:** Trailer

JR SOUTHALL





## BATMAN - RETURN OF THE CAPED CRUSADERS

DVD + BD / CERT: 12 / DIRECTOR: RICK MORALES / SCREENPLAY: MICHAEL JELNIC, JAMES TUCKER / STARRING: ADAM WEST, BURT WARD, JULIE NEWMAR / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Holy back-to-the-sixties! Adam West and Burt Ward – the definitive Batman and Robin, let's face it – are back in this bold, silly, audacious new eighty-minute animation, which spectacularly and lovingly recreates the classic day-glo Batman TV series that burned so brightly for three seasons five decades ago. It's not always easy to recreate a phenomenon from the mists of time, especially one so rooted in the hip-'n'-happening multicolour pop culture of the 1960s, and The Return of the Caped Crusaders isn't an unparalleled success. By and large, however, it's a rather touching and heartfelt tribute to a TV series so many of us grew up with and which has entertained generations across the years thanks to countless TV reruns and last year's long-awaited DVD/Blu-ray release of the entire series.

But we're all older and wiser now and it's hard not to feel a bit cynical and to wonder if this is really such a good idea. But once the credits kick in, beautifully evoking the style of the old Detective Comics covers, underscored by a strident re-recording of Neil Hefti's classic TV series theme, you'll most likely sit back with a big cheesy grin on your face and let the madness wash over you. For mad it most certainly is, the first half plunging us right into a story which wouldn't have disgraced the TV show, before launching off into outrageous new directions in its second half as it recognises the darker edge Batman has acquired in his various incarnations since his days as a TV superstar and sets out to puncture their pomposity and lack of grace. Batman and Robin's most fearsome villainous quartet - Joker, Riddler, Penguin and

Catwoman are back together - and they've stolen a revolutionary Duplication Ray. After a battle with the Caped Crusaders, the villains hijack a space-shot to an orbiting space station with the intention of duplicating the Earth so they'll each have a planet to dominate. Naturally, our heroes thwart their devilish, if not ludicrous, scheme but it turns out there's more to their plan than meets the eye, especially when Bruce Wayne/Batman starts to behave disturbingly out of character...

In truth, The Return of the Caped Crusaders is a game of two halves. The first thirty minutes or so are an absolute love-letter to the TV series and the script cleverly captures its wry larger-than-life humour whilst acknowledging - as it has to - that that was then and this is now. The voice work is astonishing. West

and Ward are back on Batduties - the former sounds a bit breathless but that's only to be expected of a man close to 90 years of age - and Julie Newmar slips purrfectly back into the slinky tones of the voluptuous Catwoman. But it's elsewhere that our socks were knocked clean off, as all the supporting baddies and players - Joker, Penguin, Riddler, Commissioner Gordon, Chief O'Hara, Alfred, Aunt Harriet - sound virtually identical to their TV originals who have all, terrifyingly, long since passed away. Joker and Penguin are especially outstanding and it's hard to believe we're not listening to Cesar Romero and Frank Gorshin back in the saddle.

The second half of the movie loses its charm and pace a little, though. Batman goes 'dark', affected by Catwoman's poison, and the story's focus drifts a bit as Batman replicates himself to create a Bat-army to control Gotham City. Batman slips on a knuckle duster to give Joker and co. a proper beating - on-screen captions, perfectly pitched in earlier well-animated fight sequences now change from 'SOCK' and 'OOF' to 'BLUDGEON' and 'FRACTURE.' The Return of the Caped Crusaders is really at its best when it's revisiting the style and tone of the legendary TV series (even with some stylistic changes to some of the show's classic sequences, such as Bruce and Dick hurtling down the Batpoles and the Batmobile roaring out of the Batcave) and its acknowledgement of and attempts to deal with the fall-out of decades of Darker Dark Knights robs it of some of its charm and innocence.

But on a purely instinctual level, it's genuinely great to have West and Ward back, even in animated form. You may have your doubts about this one going in – we certainly did – but it does, here and there, genuinely roll back the years and remind us of a time when superheroes were allowed to have fun. Chances are, you will too.

**Extras:** Villains featurette / Voice artists featurette

PAUL MOUNT





## ACCIDENTAL EXORCIST

DVD + VOD / CERT: TBC / DIRECTOR: DANIEL FALICKI / SCREENPLAY: DANIEL FALICKI, WARREN CROYLE, SHERI BETH DUSEK / STARRING: DANIEL FALICKI, FAYE SILLS, SHERRYL DEPRES, DAVID HIGBEE / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Some jobs are more glamourous than others; some people are perfect for what they do. That's the problem for Richard Vanuk (Falicki), a pill-popping alcoholic writer whose main source of income is performing exorcisms. And even that doesn't pay enough to stop the landlord's son threatening him every day for overdue money. As the film's title suggests, though, this isn't a voluntary career choice Vanuk has made. It's just something he can do.

Vanuk has no problem vanquishing demons from the

poor people he has to visit. He just gets a call from the mysterious agency that hires him and drops in on them. The actual exorcism part takes seconds, but Vanuk builds up to that moment, chatting and purging his soul to the possessed and pitiful. The procedure also takes a lot out of him, causing him to pass out and wake covered in a mixture of blood, sweat, booze and - all too often - vomit. If you think your nine to five routine is gruelling, you wouldn't last a day as Vanuk.

There are some people who want to help him, such as his brother who gets him an office job, which causes him to disassociate even more and realise he should stick to doing what he does best. As the exorcisms continue, his life and mind begin to spiral further and further into a state of disarray. His squalid apartment is lined with empty bottles and his battered hip flask is never empty, his personal demons clearly harder to beat than the others.

Falicki's film is a claustrophobic and dense nightmare. It's shot with a palette that highlights the seedy and ramshackle existence of the main character, more akin to the grimy look of *The Driller Killer* than a possession film (with the bizarre and detached tone of *Union City*), with the colours saturating the screen and tinting Vanuk's world. Managing to avoid the tropes of the subgenre, we're presented with a variety of persons under the demonic influence, but they're not the focus. As Vanuk, Falicki holds the attention throughout, whether it's during a pre-exorcism monologue, an impromptu food

fight or while he's seeing to the stigmata that flare up following the process. He finds it much easier to talk to and open up to the possessed, although one client - a deeply religious man who was blind before Vanuk cured him - does seem to get through to him at one point. He sees the effect he has on people and how grateful they are, but even this doesn't help him come to terms with the gift he has. The narrative gets deliberately skewed throughout as Vanuk's profession gets the better of him, with some moments making the viewer unsure what they are seeing - be it a mystery figure here or an odd reference there...

While *Accidental Exorcist* is a tad overlong and occasionally ponderous, it's an extremely engaging film that touches on some very tough existential issues but is handled with an intensely dark humour. It will be hard going for some viewers, but it's certainly worth the time and could one day be held in high regard as a cult film.

MARTIN UNSWORTH



## DARK WATER (2002)

DUAL / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: HIDEO NAKATA / SCREENPLAY: YOSHIHIRO NAKAMURA, KEN'ICHI SUZUKI / STARRING: HITOMI KUROKI, RIO KANNO, MIREI OGUCHI / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

In 1998, Hideo Nakata released *Ring* (or *Ringu*) and in doing so created one of the most terrifying horror characters ever seen on screen. Vengeful spirit Sadako is so distinctive that she became part of modern culture itself, and Nakata became the poster boy for the rise in the popularity of Japanese horror at the turn of the millennium. He

followed *Ring* with a direct sequel and a couple of dark thrillers before releasing *Dark Water* in 2002. Focusing on another malevolent ghost, *Dark Water* centres on young mother Yoshimi moving into a rundown apartment block with her six-year-old daughter. The thing is, *Dark Water* isn't actually that scary. So is it really a horror film?

It's fair to say that anyone

expecting *Ring*-like scares from *Dark Water* will be hugely disappointed. This is a film full of brooding menace rather than jumps and frights. There is very little 'ghostly' action for the first two acts, with Nakata instead choosing to concentrate on the mother-daughter relationship at the film's heart, and the lack of one for child spirit Mitsuko. Abandonment is an important theme for Nakata, and one that runs right through to a finale that is as powerful as it is deftly handled.

Instead of 'real' horror, *Dark Water* as a film emulates the dark presence of its protagonist. There is barely a scene that is not awkward or uncomfortable, creating an oppressive atmosphere that clings to you like a dense fog. Every surface, every inch of this world feels grimy and unwelcoming, with the seemingly perpetual rain failing to wash away any of the inherent sadness. This is a film that creeps slowly around behind you, uncomfortably caressing your shoulders rather than jumping up and screaming in your face. It is

a film that chills you without really scaring you, and is a work of brilliance.

Suspense and subtle chills are major themes throughout Japanese horror literature and film and Nakata exemplifies that more with *Dark Water* than with any other film he made. It's interesting that, in a fascinating new interview commissioned purely for this new Arrow release, Nakata states that the film's writers didn't like the finished film; they thought it not scary, and not in keeping with what they wrote.

It seems in many ways they were missing the point. To make *Dark Water* more frightening would have meant simply repeating much of what Nakata achieved in *Ring* and its sequel. This is a different film, with different themes, and as such should be appreciated for that distinction. This is an uncomfortably beautiful, grim and horrific film; just don't expect too many scares.

JOHN TOWNSEND





## LUCIFER: THE COMPLETE FIRST SEASON

DVD / CERT: 15 / CREATOR: TOM KAPINOS / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: VARIOUS / STARRING: TOM ELLIS, LAUREN GERMAN, KEVIN ALEJANDRO, D.B. WOODSIDE, LESLEY-ANN BRANDT / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Adapted from the Vertigo comic book title of the same name, Lucifer sees the Devil himself brought to life in modern-day Los Angeles. Bored of life as the Lord of Hell, Lucifer Morningstar (Tom Ellis) seeks a change of scenery and so ends up in the City of Angels. Before he knows it, he finds himself working with the LAPD, particularly Detective Chloe Decker (Lauren German), as he uses his unique

abilities and devilish charms to find criminals and punish them. With the power to have anybody and everybody tell him their deepest secrets and honest truths, what started off as Lucifer merely looking to enjoy punishing the guilty begins to open the door to his long-faded compassion, as we see the series' titular character even eyeing up the chance at some sort of redemption.

What we have with Lucifer is a show that's part cop drama, part supernatural chicanery. On the one hand, there's Detective Decker and Kevin Alejandro's wary Detective Espinoza, and then on the other hand there's the likes of Maze (Lesley-Ann Brandt), a demon who has followed Lucifer from Hell to stay by his side, and Amenadiel (D.B. Woodside), a dark-winged angel who just so happens to be Lucifer's unhappy brother. And with these two elements of the series, both have varying levels of success in how they help the show thrive... or not.

Sadly, where the LAPD-based cop work is concerned, Lucifer falls down and feels a little 'been there, done that' in what viewers are given. Lauren German as Chloe Decker does fine, and Kevin Alejandro is great as the untrusting ex-husband of Chloe who sees Lucifer growing closer to his former beau, but the environment, setting, and stories often associated with this side of the show just ultimately fall flat and feel like the generic cop show fodder that we've seen over and over again throughout the years. Luckily, though, in the show's star and in the darker aspects of the series, Lucifer does enough to make it an enjoyable ride.

As the lead, Tom Ellis is the perfect balance of charming, mischievous, vindictive, and daring, and he comes off as a truly all-powerful presence who is completely confident in the knowledge that he's more than just another mere mortal. And it's with Ellis that Lucifer shines brightest, with his cocksure Lord of Hell bringing a dose of humour and light-heartedness to proceedings, which is certainly much-needed given the material here. And as the first season progresses, we're given an ever-growing glimpse into the mindset and life story of Lucifer Morningstar, with the character maturing before our eyes, all whilst Tom Ellis wows the audience and holds their attention masterfully.

In a nutshell, Lucifer's début season is largely a mixed bag, but there's enough sleek, sultry charm involved, mainly from the series' fantastic anchor, to make this an enjoyable romp for the most part.

**Extras:** Two featurettes / 2015 Comic-Con panel / Four character profiles / Unaired scenes / Gag reel

ANDREW POLLARD



## HONEYMOON

DVD / CERT: 18 / DIRECTOR: DIEGO COHEN / SCREENPLAY: MARCO TARDITI ORTEGA / STARRING: HECTOR KOTSIFAKIS, PAULINA AHMED, ALBERTO AGNESI / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Following a little routine stalking, Jorge (Kotsifakis) kidnaps his attractive neighbour Isabel (Ahmed) and installs her as his wife (for wife, read hostage) in the basement of his home. Ceremony over, Jorge drugs, tortures, abuses and generally degrades Isabel, seemingly under the misguided belief they should be together.

The kidnap theme is a common one for filmmakers,

but Diego Cohen has taken this familiar premise and turned it into a dark, disturbing little tale with his new feature *Honeymoon*. His influences are clear, ranging from the restricted captivity of *Misery* to scenes that rival *Hostel* for brutality. And yet Cohen manages to avoid the obvious pitfalls to create a film that poses a few questions, not least of which the old nurture versus nature conundrum.

*Honeymoon* begins distinctly low-key, with little dialogue and story development in the opening act, and this is a thread that runs right through the film. Many subsequent scenes are drawn out with little action, almost as if time for the audience is passing as slowly as it is for the imprisoned Isabel. Instead of being tedious, these elongated moments add to the heightened tension, leading to greater impact in the moments of extreme brutality. One failed escape attempt leads to Isabel having the fingers of one hand skinned, a scene that will rival anything you will see this year in the difficult-to-watch stakes.

That said, instead of slipping over into more Hostel-like territory, Cohen always manages to centre his film as a very intimate, personal drama. Essentially a two-hander, *Honeymoon* feels much more like a character piece, with the interactions between Jorge and Isabel beautifully, if darkly, played out by Kotsifakis and Ahmed. Their hugely dysfunctional relationship ripples with mutual contempt despite Jorge's

apparent obsession. He is both unwilling and unable to express anything close to actual affection, seeming to prefer punishing his 'wife' rather than trying to talk her round to his warped sense of reality. This hints toward an undercurrent of mystery that leaves you wondering throughout if there is more to the situation. Perhaps there is something both characters are aware of that has yet to be revealed? And whether that is or isn't the case adds to the unavoidable discomfort of both character and audience.

As a variation on the hostage theme, *Honeymoon* is an interesting and engaging film, with strong performances and clever, almost distant directing. Whether or not it works for you will be determined entirely by how much you buy into the character's relationship and motivations, as their actions are key to how the story ultimately unfolds.

JOHN TOWNSEND





## THE NEIGHBOUR

DVD / CERT: 18 / DIRECTOR: MARCUS DUNSTAN / SCREENPLAY: MARCUS DUNSTAN, PATRICK MELTON / STARRING: JOSH STEWART, ALEX ESSOE, BILL ENGVALL, LUKE EDWARDS, MELISSA BOLONA / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Starting out as a fairly standard, if intriguingly structured crime thriller, *The Neighbour* keeps its audience on the edge of their seats through clever plotting and some genuine surprises.

John (Stewart) and wife Rosie (Essoe) are entry level crooks working for the former's uncle, a Southern cowboy in every sense who runs his small town like a big city kingpin. Desperate to escape their lives' monotony the couple are trying

to save enough cash to escape for good until a casual flirtation with a little routine voyeurism brings more trouble down than they could have imagined.

Experienced writer Marcus Dunstan seems to have finally discovered his directing chops with *The Neighbour*. The opening act is a brooding blend of mystery and misdirection, as all the main characters are introduced without any real insight being offered as to

their individual motives. The middle act, when neighbour Troy (Engvall) begins to reveal his secrets becomes a claustrophobic thriller in the style of a home invasion horror. It is in the final act that Dunstan's previous credits as the writer of several Saw films come to the fore, as extremes are hinted at, but remain in the whole cleverly unused, as *The Neighbour* picks up the pace to leave you just a little breathless.

There is a certain amount of familiarity to Dunstan's film, and many scenes that will remind an experienced horror fan of several others from *Hostel* to *Rear Window*. But in truth, that doesn't really matter here. It isn't always what you include but how you do it, and Dunstan has created more than enough malevolent portent and unsettling uncertainty to keep you guessing despite the standard horror tropes. The pacing is key to this, as once the film gets into its stride, it rarely lets up. There are few opportunities

to catch your breath as John and Rosie stumble from one situation to the next, as more and more neighbouring nastiness is discovered.

With a heritage in the same vein as *You're Next* or *Intruders*, *The Neighbour* fits smoothly into the formulaic siege-like horror draw. The difference here is in the stylish direction that creates a constant air of suspense, overly violent interludes that are as brutal as they are surprising, and performances that never miss a beat even when the tension threatens to overpower the story.

If you only see one more thriller-set-in-a-house-and-then-bad-things-happen film this year, make it *The Neighbour*. As an example of what can be done with this popular subgenre, it is about as good as it gets.

JOHN TOWNSEND



## SMOKEY AND THE BANDIT 1, 2 & 3 - THE COMPLETE COLLECTION

DVD + BD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: HAL NEEDHAM, DICK LOWRY / SCREENPLAY: VARIOUS / STARRING: BURT REYNOLDS, JACKIE GLEASON, SALLY FIELD, JERRY REED, MIKE HENRY / RELEASE DATE: NOVEMBER 21ST

Plot-wise... well, plot-wise, there really isn't all that much to any of the Smokey trilogy. But whilst the story is minimum, all three movies are overflowing with fast cars, exhilarating chase sequences, foot-tapping musical numbers, instantly quotable dialogue, Fred the basset hound, and, of course, a magnitude of marvelous, masterful moustaches. Despite being all largely similar in plot, however, all three Smokey and the Bandit efforts certainly vary in quality.

In the first film, charming rogue Bandit (Reynolds) loves nothing more than a cold beer, a hot set of wheels and a hot piece of ass. When he takes on the job of running some illegal booze across country, he soon finds himself being chased by the long arm of the law, Sheriff Buford T. Justice (Gleason) and

his klutz of a son, Junior (Henry). Luckily, Bandit has his old pal the Snowman (Reed) to keep an eye out for him on the road, although the moustachioed smooth-talking speedster also finds himself picking up Frog (Field) on his travels, and her having just jilted Junior at the alter means even more trouble on the horizon for our main man.

With Smokey and the Bandit II, we again see Bandit, Frog, Snowman, Buford T. Justice, and Junior all back for the ride. The Bandit winds up becoming involved in another cross-country run, although this time an elephant becomes an unwanted part of the plan as we see a slightly different take on the central character compared to the first time around. Here, Bandit is a man in need of finding his spark once

more. As the movie opens, Frog has left him and he's spending his days trying to find answers at the bottom of bottles. With a newfound fame from his previous shenanigans, Smokey II doesn't paint Bandit character in exactly a great light. In fact, for large parts of the film's second half, you'll find him to be quite the unlikeable prick. With seven times the budget of the original movie, and with a monumental spectacle in the final act, the sequel ultimately lacks some of the heart of its predecessor despite having a far greater budget and scope.

In the threequel, Smokey and the Bandit III, Burt Reynolds' Bandit moniker is actually handed over to Jerry Reed's Snowman. And going one step further, it's actually the Smokey of the franchise, Buford T. Justice, who finds himself challenged to speed across the country, this time as part of a bet with no-good series mainstays Big Enos (Pat McCormick) and Little Enos (Paul Williams). Snowman's Bandit – complete with a car, outfit, and moustache that all scream Burt Reynolds – ends up involved in the trek, and again shenanigans begin to escalate. Interestingly, Sheriff Justice was supposed to be both Smokey and the Bandit here, but test screenings saw that scrapped and the Snowman turned into Bandit.

As a franchise, Smokey and the Bandit was certainly one that saw the quality drop as it went on, but the original still stands up as a remarkably entertaining way to spend 90 minutes or so, and it's a true time capsule of just how charming and entertaining Burt Reynolds could be in his pomp. The sequel, which has been much-maligned by many over the years since its 1980 release, is nowhere near as bad as you may think, and there's even some great, poignant moments as Sally Field's Frog brings the cocksure Bandit crashing back down to earth (which in truth was mirroring the real-life break up of Field and Reynolds). Where Smokey III is concerned, Gleason is again brilliantly bullish as the arrogant, quip-spouting ball of rage known as Buford T. Justice, but Jerry Reed's Bandit-lite just makes you miss the presence of Burt Reynolds. And in terms of put downs and insults, they don't get any finer than the zingers handed out by Gleason's Buford throughout all three films.

For fans of the series, the cleaned-up Blu-ray transfer of all three Smokey films will make this a must-have.

**Extras:** Smokey and the Bandit II trailer

ANDREW POLLARD





## PLAN Z

DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: STUART BRENNAN / STARRING: STUART BRENNAN, MARK PAUL WAKE, BROOKE BURFITT, VICTORIA MORRISON, EUGENE HORAN / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Craig has made a plan for what he's going to do when the zombie apocalypse hits: stock up supplies, hole up until the worst of it has passed, then make a break for an isolated area. When a strain of mutated flu sweeps the country and causes the dead to rise his preparation pays off at first, but even the best laid plans sometimes need changing.

In our post-Shaun of the Dead/Zombie Survival Guide world, most undead movies

now attempt to inject a degree of humour or postmodern irony into proceedings, but Plan Z goes in the opposite direction, driving its story with nihilistic hopelessness. Instead of going on a rampage to take out as many zombies as possible and save friends and loved ones from their ravenous jaws, Craig's biggest challenge is trying to shut out the screams of the dying as he crouches barricaded in his flat. He silently justifies his decision to isolate himself,

the rules of his plan echoing in his mind like some survivalist mantra, along with his belief that trying to save people will ultimately prove futile. "We're not the fucking A-Team," he declares after a friend tries to convince him otherwise.

The film acknowledges what many of us who have devoted thought to the subject might not wish to accept: that rather than life in the zombie apocalypse becoming both a culmination and vindication of a lifetime of watching horror movies, the entire experience would actually be absolutely terrifying. The first time Craig encounters a zombie (and a lone one at that) he runs away and has to psyche himself up to go back and face it, and it's only with greater practical experience that his courage rises.

The film gets by with very little in the way of practical effects, instead making the inventive decision to use sound rather than gore. The gruesome auditory effects inspire your imagination to fill in the gaps with visceral imagery, craftily tricking your mind into thinking what's shown is far more brutal than what you actually see. Shaky camerawork adds to the

frantic intensity of action scenes, while any lulls in violence don't rely on jump scares to keep you enthralled, but utilise pervading tension to the extent that the creak of a floorboard is enough to ratchet up the apprehension.

Each character gets brief flashbacks to times before the infection hit, not for any real narrative significance, but as appreciation of basic human moments. Insignificant and unmemorable at the time, they are what remains of the humanity that is now a shattered memory, forever beyond anybody's grasp to ever reclaim. All that's left is a world so swiftly run down that people soon truly appreciate the simple pleasure of functioning electricity or the orgasmic bliss of a hot shower.

In a world as awash with independent zombie movies as the films themselves are with the ravenous undead, Plan Z is a standout entry from its bleak and uncompromising vision. You are, like its characters, instilled with a sense of grim satisfaction for making it to the end.

ANDREW MARSHALL



## TALES OF HALLOWEEN

BD + DVD / CERT: 18 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: VARIOUS / STARRING: ADRIENNE BARBEAU, HUNTER SMIT, BARRY BOSTWICK, JOHN F. BEACH, ALEX ESSOE, MARC SENTER / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Ten short films, eleven directors, and possibly the largest group of genre stars ever to grace a single project: Tales of Halloween is a beautiful thing to behold. Created by Axelle Carolyn, the project is a deservedly hyped trip on a carnival ghost train with a good dose of nostalgia and a savvy approach to its scares.

After some pop-up opening credits, the dread kicks off with Dave Parker's 'Sweet Tooth' a nasty monster story with

its eyes on gross gore and campfire stories, finished with a touch of candy porn on the side. Remedying the nastiness is Darren Lynn Bousman's 'The Night Billy Raised Hell' a boisterous show-case of what trick or treat can really mean, and it's a total hoot. Barry Bostwick (of Rocky Horror fame) camps it up, backed by comic sound effects, to deliver the most memorable performance in the film. His turn is perhaps

only matched by Pollyanna McIntosh's deranged child-hungry turn in 'Ding Dong'. The Lucky McKee-helmed segment is characteristically inconsistent like much of the icon's work, but does manage to, like *The Woman*, give McIntosh ample opportunity to horrify.

Where the ABC's of Death and V/H/S films are grossly inconsistent and generally quite experimental, Tales of Halloween shows an impressive self-control and consistency. Carolyn makes a wise move taking a page from Michael Dougherty's tasting board of terror Trick 'r Treat. Overarching plot isn't required, but cohesiveness is, and by letting characters spill out over the multiple segments it achieves just that.

Paul Solet, the director of Grace, delivers a good old fashioned revenge story in 'The Weak and the Wicked' but it would have been nice to see more gore from its well-conceived monster. That's especially apparent when Adam Gierasch's 'Trick' achieves solid shock factor without a jot of the supernatural. Axelle Carolyn's 'Grim Grinning Ghost' is a classic ghost story bolstered by Stuart

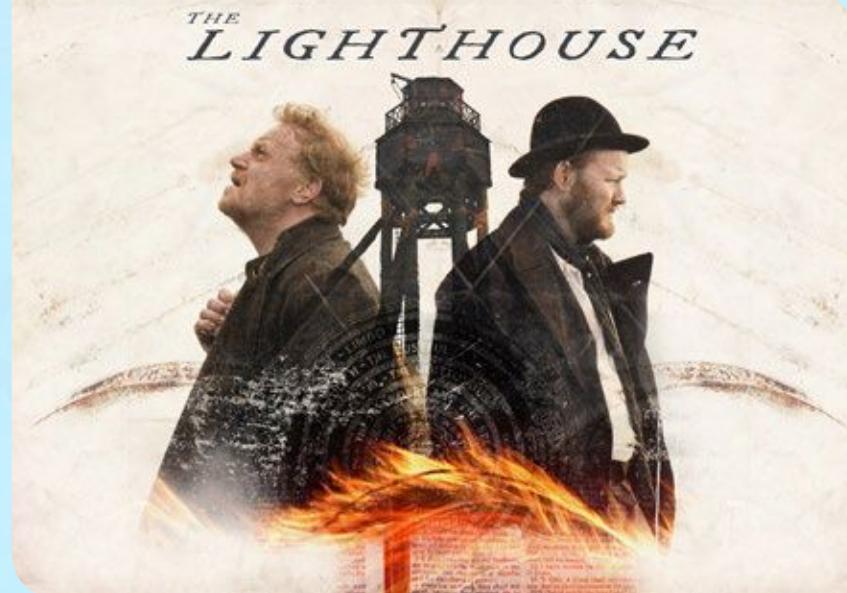
Gordon, Barbara Crampton, Mick Garris, Lisa Marie and Lin Shaye appearances. It's essentially a glorified excuse for some ace cameos, but it works. This is an innately honest anthology with its heart on its sleeve and its references proudly flaunted for everyone to see. The people involved love what they do and it shows in each short. That's why it gets away with being downright silly sometimes.

That's why Mike Mendez gets away with confronting a make-shift Jason Voorhees with a UFO experience in 'Friday the 31st'. That's also why the B-Movie brilliance of Neil Marshall-directed 'Bad Seed's giant gore-hound killer pumpkin pulls off perfectly. There's plenty other tricks and surprises up this film's sleeve but you should just go check it out.

Hard-core horror fans might despair at the lack of true scares, but it's hard not to have a good time with Tales of Halloween when it's such an unashamedly exciting ride.

SCOTT CLARK





**THE  
LIGHTHOUSE**

**Director Chris Crow sheds some light on how he brought THE LIGHTHOUSE to the screen...**

**STARBURST:** How did the true story of *The Lighthouse* come to your attention and did you immediately recognise its potential as a dramatic work?

Chris Crow: Whilst shooting my first film, *Devils' Bridge*, one of the producers (and a close friend) told me about the incident and we discussed it as the next project. Michael Jibson (who plays Howell) brought it up on *Devil's Bridge*, too. David (Lloyd, producer) was also familiar with the story. Mike and I bounced ideas back and forth for a few years. Weirdly, we developed different strains. Mike tried to set the story in the late 1970s, a ghost story set on the Smalls Island and I set the incident on a space station (an idea which was

scrapped when I heard the outline of *Gravity*). We eventually decided that we had to tell the actual story. I instantly recognised the potential for a seriously bleak film; for me it had such a cinematic potential as an atmospheric and dread-filled ordeal.

**What were the greatest logistical problems you encountered during the making of the film?**

Oddly enough a few small things caused the most trouble – the pilot gig (boat) being one of them, as very few of them still exist. The sea was too stormy to go out in to shoot so we were forced to shoot the rowing scene on a river and then composite the actual sea into the shots.

We shot the entire film in a Cardiff warehouse so we had both the interior and the exterior set next to one another. The exterior (beacon) was surrounded by a huge green screen but we needed actual rain and wind to interact with the actors physically. Rain and wind indoors!

**A gruelling time for the actors...**

Both Mark (Lewis-Jones) and Michael (Jibson) are fantastic character actors and I've worked with both of them a number of times. They were tough roles, but man, those guys got into the characters' heads. Mark actually got quite ill after the shoot as he refused to wear his aquatherm gear; he wanted to get cold and wet in the service of playing a lighthouse keeper. Yet despite everything, we had a real scream on set; I think the darker the material, the sillier you need to be. Both roles were physically and mentally challenging but I couldn't be happier with how they played them.

**How involved were you with the 'look' of the film and how important do you think it is for a director to be 'hands-on' with the visual side of a production?**

I'm always very involved with these things, I think you have to be. I come from a visual background so I really know how I want things to look; I've always been hands-on with every element – which probably makes the heads of departments and the crew want to kill me! On *The Lighthouse*, I always knew what Tim Dickel the designer, was capable of and he and his team are incredible. We started with lots of visual references; Scott's Antarctic hut was a huge influence on the living quarters. The interior set was designed so we could take each wall off independently for filming.

*THE LIGHTHOUSE* is out now on DVD.

Written by Paul Mount





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# AUDIOSTATIC

THE LATEST NEWS  
FROM THE WORLD OF  
AUDIO ADVENTURES  
BY TONY JONES



## Big Finish

A mix of bits and pieces from Big Finish this month. They released the excellent **Torchwood Archive** to mark the show's tenth anniversary and also the final series of **The Confessions of Dorian Gray**. Jago and Litefoot have now starred in a massive twelve boxsets (plus other bits) – not bad for two characters from *Talons of Weng-Chiang!* Best of all, we have early details for Series 13.

There's news of a third series of **Pathfinder Legends, Curse of the Crimson Throne**, available from January 2017. There were a whole slew of updates to release dates including the next set of **The Prisoner** stories (August 2017, just before that show's 50th anniversary), **Charlotte Pollard** Series 2 (March 2017) and the second, and much anticipated, series of **The Omega Factor** (March 2017).

## R4/4 Extra

A good mix of titles on the BBC (again) includes a welcome, if occasional, drama on Radio 3, **Vampyre Man** ([bbc.co.uk/programmes/b05qjsw](http://bbc.co.uk/programmes/b05qjsw)), by Joseph O'Connor. This is about the friendship between Bram Stoker and famous Shakespearean actor Henry Irving. To prove it's not only about classical music, Radio 3 also broadcast a JM Barrie play, **Mary Rose** ([bbc.co.uk/programmes/b0801l4v](http://bbc.co.uk/programmes/b0801l4v)), about a girl on a sinister Scottish island who never grows up. Bryony Hannah took the part of Mary and Bill Paterson played JM Barrie himself.

Radio 4 Extra have given some much needed airtime to a 1982 World Service adaptation of John Wyndham's **Midwich Cuckoos** ([bbc.co.uk/programmes/b007jmfp](http://bbc.co.uk/programmes/b007jmfp)). Broadcast in three parts, it was adapted by William Ingram with William Gaunt as Richard Gayford, the narrator whose wife avoids the fate of the rest of the Midwich women as they had been in London celebrating Richard's birthday.

## Podcasts Spotlight

Podcasts mean many things to many people. For **AudioStatic**, we mean those podcasts used to distribute science fiction/fantasy/horror drama as opposed to the myriad of other types (reviews, music, cooking and whatever). Even with that focus, there are many tens of thousands of titles, groups of people and genres. Some podcasts are essentially fan fic (and not always licensed) and range from the self-indulgent to the rather excellent, including the work of Darker Projects ([darkerprojects.com](http://darkerprojects.com)); any new fan of podcast drama could do a lot worse than start there.

We've long followed the crowd-sourced, semi-professional offerings such as **The Light of September** and **The Minister of Chance**, but the field is much larger than that and it can be a challenge to find the best amongst the rest. We at STARBURST are committed to

helping the upcoming and the independent, and as part of that aim to include a selection of titles each month in this column.

First up is Action Science Theatre ([actionsciencetheatre.com](http://actionsciencetheatre.com)), which promises a mix of action, science, comedy and silly voices for around 20 minutes or so in every podcast. They've so far reached number 47 and are releasing new titles on the first of every month. They aim to entertain and inform – this approach continues onto their blog as well. Like many podcasts, they are available from both iTunes and via their site.

Now is also a good time to catch up with **The Deep Vault** ([deepvaultpodcast.com](http://deepvaultpodcast.com)), a set of seven podcasts released every other Wednesday. The premise is simple: a post-apocalyptic United States, robots, monsters, and computers meet the claustrophobic steel walls of a mysterious underground bunker.

**BIG FINISH**

WE LOVE STORIES

Key titles to watch out for this month from Big Finish...

### DOCTOR WHO: 3.3: THE RAVELLI CONSPIRACY

The First Doctor lands in Florence, Italy in 1514 and he must enlist the help of Niccolò Machiavelli to rescue Steven (Peter Purves) and Vicki (Maureen O'Brien) after they are arrested by Giuliano de Medici's guards. Expect plenty of lies and betrayal.

**AVAILABLE NOVEMBER 30th**

+++

### SURVIVORS SERIES 05

Four more episodes of the popular apocalyptic tale see the team continuing their struggle to stay alive after a virus has wiped out most of the world's population. Illness isn't the only threat they confront as other remaining humans pose just as much of a threat.

**AVAILABLE NOVEMBER 30th**

+++

### DOCTOR WHO SHORT TRIPS: 6.11: THE MAN WHO WASN'T THERE

This month's story is read by India Fisher and sees the Eighth Doctor and Fisher's Charley Pollard attempt to find out where in time a plot is set to happen that will affect the future.

**AVAILABLE NOVEMBER 30th**

+++

### DOCTOR WHO THE THIRD DOCTOR ADVENTURES VOLUME 02

Another two stories with the Third Doctor (as played by Tim Treloar) and companion Jo Grant (Katy Manning) – one set on Ephros, a dying planet with a subterranean secret and the other in Bramfield New Town where Jo's cousin has gone missing.

**AVAILABLE NOVEMBER 30th**

+++

### UNIT: 3 SILENCED

The creepy Silence are back after they were defeated by the Eleventh Doctor; how will UNIT fight a foe that they have no record of ever existing? Jemma Redgrave and Ingrid Oliver return as Kate Stewart and Petronella Osgood, respectively, in a four-part adventure that should be unforgettable.

**AVAILABLE NOVEMBER 30th**

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# REVIEWS

THE LATEST AUDIO  
RELEASES REVIEWED  
AND RATED



## THE LIVING PLANET: A PORTRAIT OF THE EARTH (1984)

COMPOSER: ELIZABETH PARKER / LABEL: SILVA SCREEN / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Silva Screen's continuing series of reissues from the BBC Radiophonic Workshop has absolutely delighted and amazed us, and the music from the

BBC television series *The Living Planet* continues that trend. This LP is a bit of a departure from the past compilation releases, focusing entirely on the music of Elizabeth Parker for the 1984 documentary series.

Jungle deals in swells of sound, combined with something akin to the tone of a pan flute, evoking the majestic climbing trees and flitting birds in a way which makes one wonder why anyone's ever tried to top its brilliance. It's attempted again on *Seas of Grass*, but doesn't work quite as well - it seems as though Parker's attempting a through-line that doesn't quite connect.

Additionally, it's one of a few tracks whose high notes were too much for even my hi-fi system, causing quite a bit of red-lining, and leading to a less-than-pleasant listening experience. The blown-out nature of these tracks - which almost, but not quite happens on the likes of *The Baking Deserts*, as well - removes some of the laconic bliss which the listener would otherwise derive from these Vangelis-like pieces.

Minor pressing issues aside, *The*

*Living Planet* is very much the sort of album one needs in their home. Elizabeth Parker manages to evoke worldwide landscapes with very simple instrumentation, and her work definitely earns the 'enthralling' moniker with which they've affixed it on the back cover blurb.

The vinyl comes on arctic white, which looks as it were taken from a slab of ice in the middle of a snowstorm. It looks great, and while the high tones could definitely stand a bit of come-down in the mix, *The Living Planet* otherwise sounds astounding. The opening and closing themes, despite being composed on different instrumentation, sound just as good as the rest of the music, and maybe even benefit from being a little different than the rest. That story is related in Parker's newly written sleeve notes for Silva Screen's reissue, which also includes the original release's write-up.

NICK SPACEK



## DOCTOR WHO: THE FIFTH TRAVELLER

AUTHOR: PHILIP LAWRENCE / DIRECTOR: LISA BOWERMAN / STARRING: WILLIAM RUSSELL, MAUREEN O'BRIEN, JEMMA POWELL, JAMES JOYCE / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

The latest in Big Finish's Early Adventures range, Philip Lawrence's *The Fifth Traveller* begins in medias res, with the Doctor and his companions being chased through an alien city by some rather narked-off

soldiers. It's an unconventionally active beginning for a First Doctor story, albeit one that gives way to a more traditional set-up once the Doctor, Ian, Barbara, Vicki and Jospa, having escaped in the TARDIS, land on the jungle planet of the Arunde.

What we have from this point onwards is, in large part, a good attempt to mimic First Doctor alien planet stories like *The Web Planet* and *The Savages*, with the team splitting up, exploring the jungle, and dealing with obstacles.

There's also a subplot about a device which will potentially give the Doctor control of the TARDIS's destinations (these were the days when he had no clue how to pilot the thing), which allows for an interesting exploration of his companions - Ian and Barbara would love to return home, which upsets the orphaned Vicki, who sees her fellow travellers as the only family she has. There's some nice bonding between her and Jospa, who (as we all know) is an orphan too and so can empathise with her.

Vicki's the heart of this story and Maureen O'Brien puts in an affecting performance, as does James Joyce as Jospa. Jemma Powell's Barbara continues to be a fine replacement for the sadly missed Jacqueline Hill, and William Russell, as well as being Ian, provides a

solid Hartnell impression.

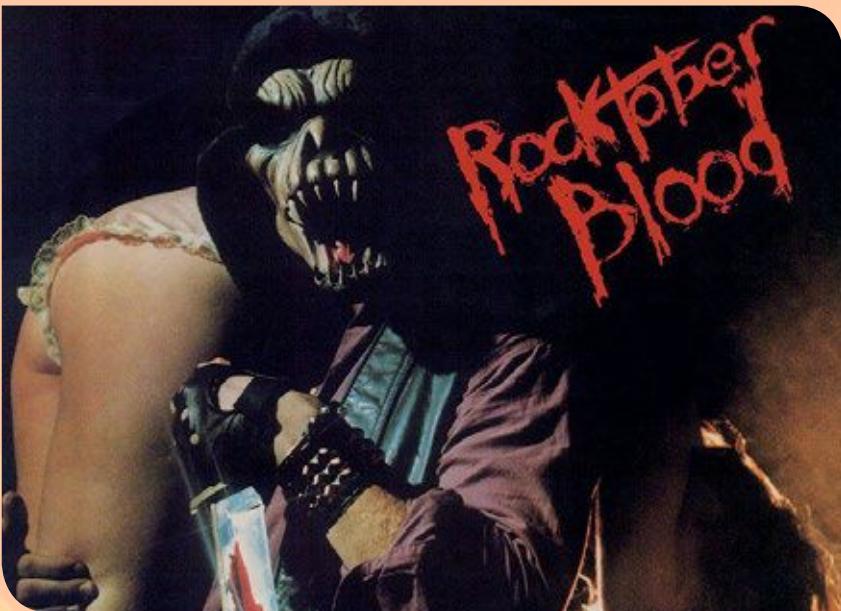
This character dynamic allows our heroes' story to feel well paced, which makes it a shame when the story cuts away to the ape-like Arunde; their story is a rather typical power struggle, and given that it takes until part three for any of them to properly meet any of the travellers, does drag on a bit.

Of course, there is another element at play - you may have guessed from the title and the new companion being treated as if he's been around for a while that something's up with this Jospa character. Needless to say, the truth behind the fifth traveller is revealed over the course of the story - we won't spoil the twists, but it's a mystery that Lawrence weaves neatly into the plot.

So, despite the central story of the Arunde being somewhat generic and padded, both the character exploration and the unusual mystery weaved into it turn *The Fifth Traveller* into a compelling drama. With cast old and new giving engaging performances as this classic TARDIS team (plus one), this will be a treat for any First Doctor fan.

KIERON MOORE





## ROCKTOBER BLOOD (1984)

COMPOSER: VARIOUS ARTISTS / LABEL: LUNARIS RECORDS / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Heavy metal horror was such a short-lived phenomenon in the early '80s, one can barely call it a movement in horror cinema. The actual metal-themed horror flicks - ones with a band bringing evil to a town - can be counted on one hand, but to their loyal legions of fans, they're heads and shoulders above the standard fare of the day.

Like its brethren in Trick or Treat, Black Roses, Hard Rock Zombies, Rock 'n' Roll Nightmare, et al, Rocktober Blood is just as remembered for its soundtrack as it is for the poorly acted teased-hair fest

that was the movie itself. Most of these flicks revolve around dead rockers coming back to raise hell - usually quite literally - and Rocktober Blood was no exception. Happily, the soundtrack holds up a lot better than the film itself. Lunaris Records has done metalheads the world over a huge favour by reissuing this collection of tunes, and from the moment it showed up in the mail, we've been blasting the hell out of it. The first two cuts, I'm Back and Rainbow Eyes, are obviously the best-known, really could've been issued as a



## JAGO AND LITEFOOT SERIES 12

WRITERS: JUSTIN RICHARDS, PAUL MORRIS, SIMON BARNARD / DIRECTOR: LISA BOWERMAN / STARRING: CHRISTOPHER BENJAMIN, TREVOR BAXTER, LISA BOWERMAN, CONRAD ASQUITH, RONALD PICKUP / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Those intrepid investigators of infernal incidents are back in their twelfth collection of curious capers, courtesy of those audio impresarios at Big Finish Productions. As any fan of the company's output knows,

Jago & Litefoot is one of their strongest continuing ranges - and Series 12 is another sturdy run.

Justin Richards' 'Picture This' kicks off the quartet of new adventures with a trip to the Scarlet Gallery, where the paintings are reputably haunted. Naturally, this makes for an evocative setting, if a slightly peculiar one for audio. Richards spins an enjoyable yarn (or should that be paints a fetching portrait?) that is peppered with some suitably eerie moments. Plus, it does a good job of setting up the series' ongoing plot threads.

'The Flickermen' from Paul Morris and Simon Barnard is perhaps the best of this bunch, as it features a historical guest star and an intriguing new monster. When cinematic pioneer R.W. Paul's theatrograph shows begin outselling Jago's music hall acts, he and Litefoot take a trip to the fairground to check out the competition... and discover a terrible monster connected to the new technology. The titular Flickermen, who phase in and out of reality, are distinctly Moffatesque - they even come with their own creepy nursery rhyme.

Paul Morris' 'School of Blood' and 'Warm Blood' by Justin Richards form a kind of loose two-parter, as Jago and Litefoot investigate the vampire attacks sweeping London - which they fear could be the work

split single, and should've been huge hits. I'm Back is a high-voiced bit of glam, and has been the first thing in our heads upon waking up every morning since we first put needle to wax.

The tunes by Headmistress, featuring singer Susie Rose, dominate the soundtrack more than we'd remembered, ranging from the Pat Benatar-esque Watch Me Rock to the more Joan Jett take that is Can't Kill Rock and Roll. They're arguably more rock 'n' roll than metal proper, but the tunes fronted by the character of Billy Harper and voiced by former Mott the Hoople frontman Nigel Benjamin - the aforementioned I'm Back, as well as Killer on the Loose - are as metal as anything put out in the early '80s.

We were just stating the other day that more records need locked grooves, so it's a happy thing that Watching You - which is actually a pretty tender, if slightly creepy ballad - ends with the sinister repetition of 'Evil Kills' ad infinitum until one lifts up the needle from the end of side one. Combined with the very disturbing back-masked take on I'm Back entitled Kcab-Mi, and this is exactly the sort of thing people about which people freaked out during the '80s Satanic panic.

The vinyl sounds pretty solid. Our copy came on grey marbled wax, and while a little muddy, still manages to confer all the necessary rock we'd expect from these tracks. There's an insert with promotional text and a poster for the movie, and we'd totally frame it for the wall if we weren't such absurd collector nerds. It's a great package.

NICK SPACEK



of their barmaid friend Ellie Higson. 'School' is a fun boarding school mystery, especially as Henry and George get to go incognito - as caretaker and science teacher, respectively - in order to solve the unexplained disappearances of the staff members.

The series finale 'Warm Blood' has a lot going for it. As well as harking back to events from Series 1, it has to deal with both the emotional conflict between Ellie, Jago and Litefoot and the high stakes (if you'll pardon the pun) of the Old One and his vampire army. In the event, the whole thing is sadly tied up a little too quickly and neatly for it to be a totally satisfying final hour.

Without the frills and high concepts of certain other series - for instance, Series 11 featuring both the Sixth Doctor and the Master - Jago & Litefoot Series 12 doesn't exactly carve out anything new. Even so, the odd couple dynamic of its stars is as entertaining as ever, and Christopher Benjamin and Trevor Baxter never let the side down. All in all, this is yet another solid round of adventures for what is, by some margin, the longest-running Doctor Who spin-off in any medium. And for good reason, too.

CHRISTIAN BONE



# OST

THE STARBURST  
GUIDE TO THE LATEST  
SOUNDTRACKS  
BY NICK SPACEK



We opened last month's column talking about Michael Giacchino and *Star Wars: Rogue One*, and kind of ran the composer down. Having now heard parts of his work for *Doctor Strange*, we'd like to take back our hesitation. The music released has been described as sounding like 'Mark Knopfler at a renaissance festival with the Phantom of the Opera on harpsichord.' It's psychedelic and weird and messed up and exactly what we need for a movie based in such '70s throwback imagery. It's due out at the middle of this month from Hollywood Records.

In further Marvel news of '70s throwbacks, if you haven't gotten on the *Luke Cage* soundtrack train, you're missing out. While the first Mondo double vinyl pressing sold out in no time at all, they've already gotten on a second one. Obviously, it's available digitally as well, and we'd really recommend getting something you can listen to right now, because you're not going to want to wait for these tunes.

In addition to the score by *Black Dynamite*'s Adrian Younge and Ali Shaheed Muhammad of A Tribe Called Quest, which is an astonishing blend of soul cinema funk and spaghetti western tension, there are modern soul cuts from Raphael Saadiq and Sharon Jones and the Dap-Kings. There's also a track, *Stop and Look (And You Have Found Love)*, which features Younge performing with the Delfonics that might be the epitome of the show's melding '70s soul with modern hip-hop.

Mondo/Death Waltz digitally released the Pierre Takal score for the Morgan Spurlock documentary *Rats*. The 'horrormentary,' as the director dubbed it, was made for the Discovery Channel, and debuted the weekend before Halloween, so it makes sense for the label to have put out this uncomfortable collection of horror synths. However, it's not just slasher worship: as the documentary moves around the world, Takal infuses his score with elements of other instruments, such as an excellent

use of tabla of *No Gloves No Shoes*, which takes place in Mumbai. The digital is available now, with vinyl due in early 2017.

At the beginning of last month, Death Waltz released the score to the sleazy horror comedy, *The Greasy Strangler*, composed by Andrew Hung. The movie's received a lot of comparisons to classic-era Troma features mixed with vintage John Waters gross-out oddities, and Hung's score is a cavalcade of bent, decaying synths with a solid bounce to the rhythm. The vinyl version is pressed on 180-gram 'shocking pink' vinyl with a white greasy splatter, and is limited to 1000 copies. It's available digitally from most online retailers, as well.

While the news of Death Waltz's limited-edition single release of Joe LoDuca's live re-score of *Evil Dead* is pretty astonishing news, it's not terribly surprising. The label's made event-only vinyl before, so a release tied to LoDuca's appearance at the Ace Hotel in Los Angeles is exactly the sort of thing Death Waltz could be expected to do.

However, it's not just a single: according to the details on the Soundcloud stream, LoDuca 'has also composed all-new music for the film, which will see a release by Death Waltz Recording Co. in 2017 to accompany a US tour of the live re-score.' Now it's just a matter of waiting for the announcement of that release and the pre-sale for those tour tickets.

Speaking of tours, we're extremely excited for next year's *Game of Thrones* Live Concert Experience. The massive 28-city tour kicks off February 15th in Kansas City, and being as how that's your columnist's hometown, he's hoping to be present for what looks to be an absolutely intense experience, including



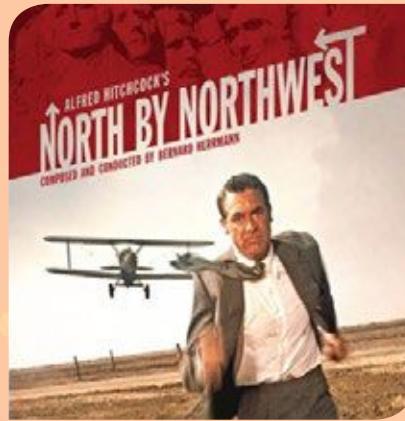
**The Greasy Strangler** by Andrew Hung



Ramin Djawadi conducting an 80-piece orchestra and choir, the 360-degree concert experience with giant screens and things extending into the universe - and we think we might've seen some fire in a preview concept video, as well. Thus far, the tour is North America only (and really just the United States, as there's only three Canadian dates), but one can expect it to make it to Europe and beyond if it's reasonably successful.

The third season of the highly successful Netflix series **Black Mirror** came out just in time for Halloween, and one of the six episodes was scored by the talented duo of Geoff Barrow and Ben Salisbury, the gents behind **Ex\_Machina**. The score was released digitally by Invada Records in conjunction with the series' release on Netflix, and it's striking - to the surprise of no one. The pair also scored Ben Wheatley's next film, the massive shoot-out genre homage, **Free Fire**, due out next March.

It's astonishing to consider the fact Bernard Herrmann's classic score to the seminal Hitchcock thriller, **North by Northwest**, didn't see a release in any format until Turner Classic Movies put it out on compact disc in 1995. Given the rate at which modern composers refer to Herrmann, and the importance of his scores to those classic Hitchcock films, it's inevitable that so much of his work is seeing reissue as of late. So, many thanks to Silva Screen for putting out the very first vinyl edition of the music of **North by Northwest**. Due out the beginning of December, it's pressed on



black vinyl as a double LP.

Ship to Shore Phonograph Co. continue their stellar slate of releases, with quite a few teases courtesy of a listening station at last month's MondoCon in Austin, Texas. While no release dates or other details are available, we do know that music from the vintage video games **Rocket Knight Adventures** and **Darius** will be out at some point, as well as the recently Kickstarted indie game, **Super Russian Roulette**. There's also the unreleased score to 1988's **Troma's War**, as composed by Christopher DeMarco. So much strange stuff, yet it all seems to fit together so snugly.

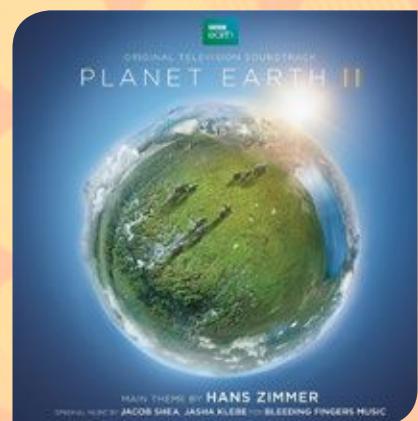
WaterTower Music - the music label ran by Warner Bros that releases all of their film music - put out Joseph Bishara's scores for both of the James Wan **Conjuring** films just in time for Halloween. It's a single picture disc, with highlights from the first film on the A-side, and music from the sequel on the B-side. Neither score is complete, but the LP does include Mark Isham's *Family Theme* at the end of side A. The price is pretty reasonable, but no clue as to the audio quality, although picture discs sound better than they did a decade ago.

Out next month via metal label Relapse Records is the score to **The Mind's Eye**, Joe Begos' follow-up to his excellently weird 2013 début, **Almost Human**. Composed by Zombi's Steve Moore, the score is a set of electronic jams that fall somewhere between the strangeness of Moore's work for **Cub** and



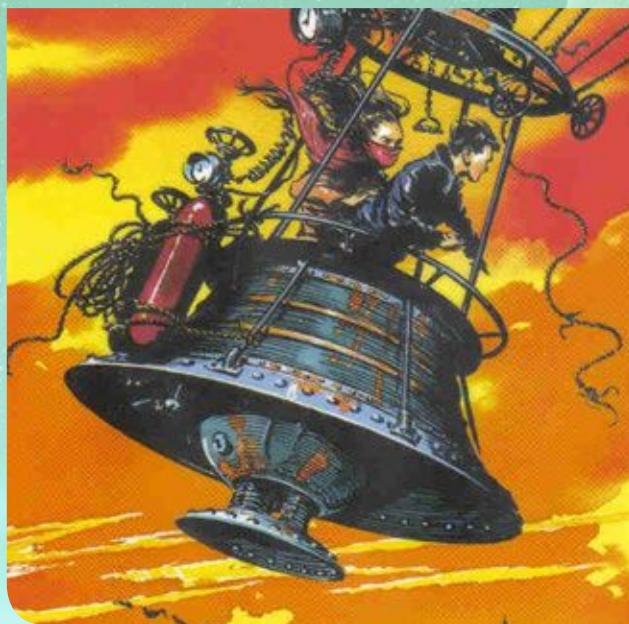
the more straight ahead work he did for **The Guest**. Certain tracks are obvious Carpenter worship, but there's also a great element of Goblin-esque funk which runs throughout and makes **The Mind's Eye** a lot of fun - the emphasis being on 'a lot.' The release of Moore's score runs just two minutes shy of the actual runtime of the **Scanners**-influenced bit of terrifying sci-fi. That's a lot of music, and will be available in early December on compact disc and digital download. There's also a double vinyl LP on standard black, in addition to limited edition versions of 200 copies on electric blue with aqua blue and bone white splatter, and 100 on clear.

Finally, if you've not gotten the Hans Zimmer score to **Planet Earth II**, shame on you. We know, we know - Zimmer's not the most exciting composer in the world, and his work for the latest Dan Brown adaptation, **Inferno**, is pretty standard fare and a crippling disappointment after the glory that was **Interstellar**. All that aside, his music for the sequel to the amazing BBC nature series is absolutely perfect. George Fenton's score for the original series, released over a decade ago, presented a high bar to clear, but Zimmer has crafted music that ably complements the glorious high-definition imagery of the natural world, while not taking away from the fact that we're here to look at what's going on, not listen to the music. It's available digitally from most major retailers, as well as a double compact disc from Silva Screen.



# BRAVE NEW WORDS

ED FORTUNE BRINGS  
YOU THE LATEST  
NEWS FROM  
THE WORLD OF  
GENRE LITERATURE



## Peter Jackson to adapt MORTAL ENGINES

**Lord of The Rings** and **Braindead** director Peter Jackson is adapting a film version of Philip Reeve's **Mortal Engines**. Production is scheduled to start in New Zealand in spring 2017. **Mortal Engines** is a Young Adult Steampunk novel set on a world shattered by a devastating war. It is impossible to stay in one place because the Earth has become so hostile. Cities have become huge, roaming things, powered by contraptions and the like.

## Anna Smaill wins the World Fantasy Award

The winners for the 2016 World Fantasy Awards were announced at the World Fantasy Convention this October. Of course, by World we mean North America, specifically Columbus, Ohio. Anna Smaill won Best Fantasy Novel for her book **The Chimes**, a novel about music that steals memory and a world in which no one remembers the past.

Other winners include Kelly Barnhill for her Long Fiction work **The Unlicensed Magician** and Galen Dara for Best Artist.

## UK 2024 Worldcon Bid Underway

In an attempt to make the World Science Fiction Convention truly global, we'd like to remind readers that there is an ongoing effort to bring Worldcon back to the UK in 2024. The bid team is formed of many of the people who brought the event to the UK in 2014. It should be noted that bids to bring Worldcon to Ireland in 2019 are still ongoing (and are looking good), and of course, 2017's Worldcon will be in Helsinki, which isn't terribly far away when you think about it.

## The Harlan Ellison Books Preservation Project Launches

An endeavour to preserve the works of Harlan Ellison for future generations has been launched on crowdfunding platform Kickstarter. Ellison mostly kept his work on traditional, non-

electronic media. This project intends to digitise it all, creating a digital library of Harlan's entire literary output, based on thousands of papers filed in his home office. Sounds like a daunting project, and they need \$100,000 to pull it off. The rewards are Harlan Ellison books, of course.

## Christopher Tolkien awarded the Bodley Medal

J. R. R. Tolkien's son Christopher has been honoured with the Bodley Medal. It is awarded by the University of Oxford's Bodleian Library to individuals who have made outstanding contributions to the worlds of literature, culture, science, and communication. Christopher has dedicated much of his life to editing his father's work. Though J. R. R. Tolkien is best known as one of the fathers of the modern fantasy genre, he was also one of the most prestigious professors of language the world has ever seen, and his legacy affects the world of writing to this day.

## The European Utopiales Award Announced

The winners of the Prix Utopiales 2016 were announced at the award ceremony at the Utopiales International Science Fiction Festival of Nantes in France on October 31st. The award includes a cash prize.

**The European Utopiales Award** went to **Le vivant** by Anna Starobinets. Translation (from Russian) Raphaëlle Pache (Mirobole Editions).

**The European Utopiales Youth Award 2015** went to **Empreinte digitale** by Patrice Favaro (Thierry Magnier Éditions).

**The Prix Julia Verlanger Award** went to **Le Club des Punk contre l'Apocalypse Zombie** by Karim Berrouka.

## Telos Launch New Books at Sci-Fi Weekender

As part of the annual Sci-Fi Weekender event, held in North Wales from March 30th - April 2nd, 2017, Telos Publishing is releasing three new titles, all of which are being launched at the event. The first is **Weekender Reading**, an anthology of short stories from various guests at this year's event. Contributors include Darren Shan, Paul Lewis, Justina Robson, Freda Warrington, David J Howe, and Sam Stone. The other two books are **Small Ghosts** by Paul Lewis - a novella of quiet terror - and Freda Warrington's short story collection **Nights of Blood Wine**.

## Sheri S. Tepper (1929-2016)

Author Sheri S. Tepper died aged 87 on October 22nd, 2016. Tepper, a staunch environmentalist and feminist as well as a highly regarded author, is best known for her 1989 work **Grass**. Much of her work was nominated for awards like the Clarke, the Tiptree, the Hugo, and so on. She received a World Fantasy life achievement award in 2015. She will be greatly missed.

## 2018 World Fantasy Convention Awarded To Baltimore

And finally, we hear that the 2018 World Fantasy Convention will be in Baltimore, and humbly suggest that the event change its name to something more accurate and less global.

Catch **STARBURST**'s own book podcast, **Brave New Words**, via our website [starburstmagazine.com](http://starburstmagazine.com) and on twitter @radiobookworm.

ED FORTUNE  
HIGHLIGHTS  
NOTEWORTHY  
NEW TITLES

# COMING SOON



## CARAVAL

AUTHOR: STEPHANIE GARBER  
PUBLISHER: HODDER & STOUGHTON  
RELEASE DATE: JANUARY 31ST

**Caraval** offers all the fun (and dread) of the circus. The story introduces Scarlett, a young woman who has never left the tiny isle of Trista, who yearns for the wonder of the wandering carnival that is Caraval. To Scarlett and her beloved sister Tella, Caraval represents freedom and an escape from their cruel, abusive father. Lured by the promise of magic, mystery, and adventure, things go wrong when Scarlett's sister goes missing. Is Caraval simply an elaborate performance, or is it something much darker?



## BITCH PLANET VOLUME 2: PRESIDENT BITCH

AUTHORS: KELLY SUE DECONNICK (AUTHOR), VALENTINE DE LANDRO (ARTIST), TAKI SOMA (ARTIST)  
PUBLISHER: IMAGE COMICS  
RELEASE DATE: JANUARY 31ST

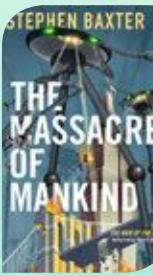
Eisner-nominated writer Kelly Sue DeConnick's extraordinary tour de force continues with Volume 2 of *Bitch Planet*. Set in a world in which women have pretty much become slaves to men, any woman who opposes the status quo faces a life outcast on the cruellest penal planet in the galaxy. Explore the uninviting halls of Auxiliary Compliance Outpost #2 and uncover the first clues to the history of this nightmare world. Prepare for a powerful journey and, for some, a much-needed eye opener.



## EMPIRE GAMES

AUTHOR: CHARLES STROSS  
PUBLISHER: TOR  
RELEASE DATE: JANUARY 26TH

Charles Stross is best known for his *Laundry* series, but many of us still have a lot of love for his parallel Earth-hopping Family Trade series. The Empire Games marks a new set of tales building on from that world. Set in 2020, it has been 17 years since the New British Empire fell and became the rapidly growing North American Commonwealth. Sadly, it may not last, as invaders from another Earth are coming, and they intend to conquer. Expect a trans-dimensional thriller with a growing collection of characters and intricate intrigue.



## THE MASSACRE OF MANKIND

AUTHOR: STEPHEN BAXTER  
PUBLISHER: GOLLANCZ  
RELEASE DATE: JANUARY 19TH

H. G. Wells' classic *The War of The Worlds* has inspired an awful lot of science fiction. Stephen Baxter is rather good at respinning old ideas into something new and wonderful, so his latest work, a sequel to *The War of the Worlds*, looks rather good. Set 14 years after the Martians invaded England, the world has moved on. Machinery looted from the abandoned capsules and war machines has led to technological leaps forward. The Martians are susceptible to simple germs. The army is prepared. Or is it?



## AT THE SPEED OF LIGHT

AUTHOR: SIMON MORDEN  
PUBLISHER: NEWCON PRESS NOVELLA  
RELEASE DATE: JANUARY 23RD

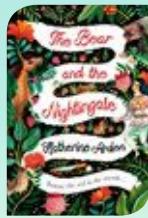
Newcon Press are an award-winning small press that specialises in science fiction, best known for picking up the less noticed (but incredibly worthwhile) talents in the genre world and highlighting them. *At the Speed of Light* is a tense drama set in the depths of space. Set aboard a ship that has travelled beyond the reach of human knowledge, it's a tale of discovery, loneliness, and understanding. Created by actual rocket scientist Simon Morden (Ph.D.), it's a promising story from the Philip K. Dick Award-winning writer.



## UNDER A WATCHFUL EYE

AUTHOR: ADAM NEVILL  
PUBLISHER: MACMILLAN  
RELEASE DATE: JANUARY 12TH

With the unexpected entrance of a dark figure into Seb Logan's life, everything he's worked so hard to leave behind threatens to shatter his tranquil lifestyle. Particularly since every sighting plunges him further and further into darkness and paranoia. Tormented and pursued, Seb realises that his stalker is not alone and that something deeper and nastier is happening to his life. Seb begins a journey into the heart of despair, one that will change everything. From one of the up-and-coming modern masters of horror, this is certainly worth a look.



## THE BEAR AND THE NIGHTINGALE

AUTHOR: KATHERINE ARDEN  
PUBLISHER: DEL REY  
RELEASE DATE: JANUARY 12TH

This Russian fairy tale-inspired work promises to steal the fire from the likes of Neil Gaiman and Erin Morgenstern. A bold claim indeed. Set in a village at the edge of the wilderness of northern Russia, a father is given a beautiful chain to pass to his daughter. Suspicious of its power, the father hides the gift away and his daughter, Vasya, grows up a harsh, headstrong girl, to the irritation of her family. When mysterious forces come to her village, however, the power of the jewellery unlocks, and the girl finds herself on a complicated journey.



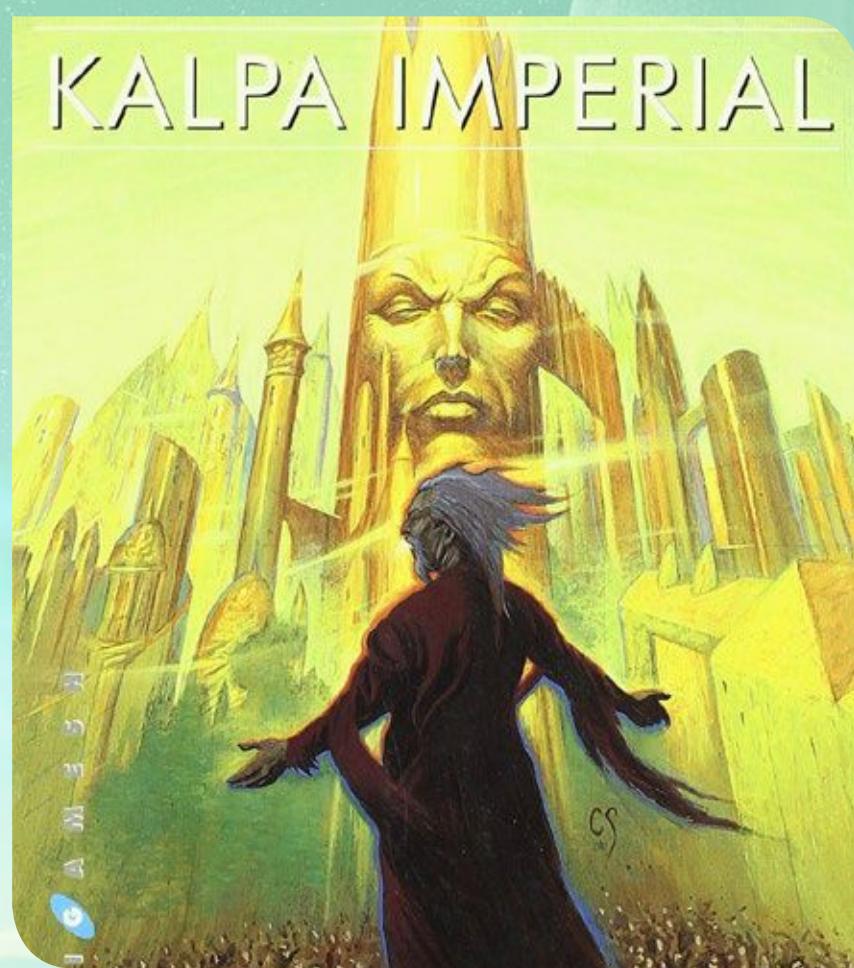
## PALE GUARDIAN: A VAMPIRE MYSTERY

AUTHOR: BARBARA HAMBLY  
PUBLISHER: SEVERN HOUSE  
RELEASE DATE: DECEMBER 30TH

Mixing zombies, vampires, and World War One seems to be the order of the day for Hambly's latest work, *Pale Guardian*. What could make the horrors of war even worse than actual monsters? Worse still, the vampires (who have some interest in making sure humanity stays alive) are in trouble, as the walking corpses that have become a principle weapon of war are particularly devastating to vampires and the like. Expect a cool mash-up of monster fun.

# BOOK WORMHOLE

A MONTHLY PICK  
OF GENRE FICTION  
BY KATE FATHERS



If J. R. R. Tolkien wrote a book entirely about the history of Gondor, it might have looked something like *Kalpa Imperial*.

Originally published in Spanish in 1983, Angélica Gorodischer's collection of fantasy stories was translated into English by Ursula K. Le Guin in 2003. Each story, narrated by an unnamed storyteller, tells of a vast fictional empire. It spans miles and centuries, has fallen and been resurrected, and has been built on backs of emperors, gamblers and ordinary chambermaids. We never read the end of this empire, but we can assume that it lives on, in some form, even if it's only as a story.

Although this is a fantasy collection, *Kalpa Imperial* is very light on the traditional trappings of fantasy. There are no wizards or witches or demons in these stories. There is very little magic and only a single mention of a dragon. If I were to compare this book to anything, it would

be to western fairy tales and Arthurian legends, where the focus is primarily on the actions of human beings rather than the supernatural. And this action is usually presented simply, without chapter-long battles or detailed descriptions of gore. In many ways, this stylistic simplicity works well for Gorodischer, as whatever message she is trying to convey is made clear; her descriptions of violence (which are frequent) are made more brutal. By using the prose of a fairy tale, she also turns the mundane into the magical. Prolonged illness sounds like a curse under her pen; superstitious belief sounds like a spell. You don't necessarily have to have overt magic to make your story fantastic, and I wonder if this is part of what Gorodischer is doing with these stories. While she is writing fantasy fiction, she also appears to be examining the nature of it, toying with its traditions and investigating how myth and

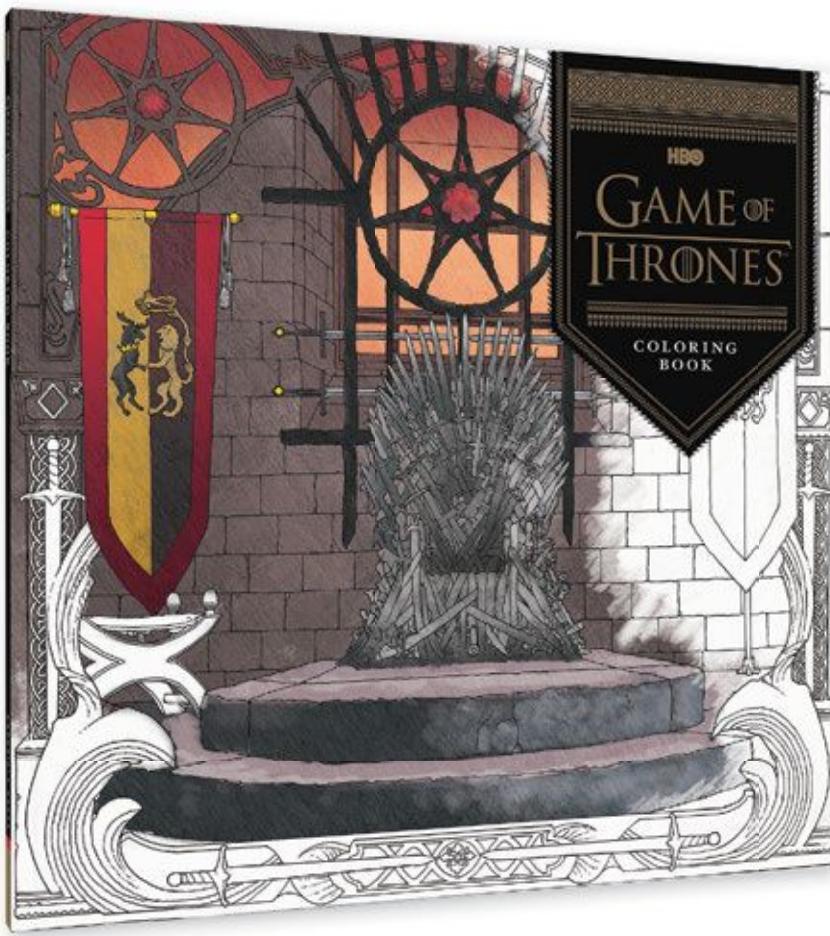
legend (what some would call the first fantasies) are built up.

This layering is a big theme in *Kalpa Imperial*. Gorodischer layers narration, having stories within stories, mirroring the empire that is built on top of the ruins of what came before. There are layers of perspectives, and layers to character's identities, and while we are only given a fraction of the history we feel Gorodischer must completely know, what we are allowed is still wonderfully rich and complex. This layering also shows us the ultimate nature of empire: its impermanence. Impermanence is another key theme of the book, as we are made aware from the start that neither a single incarnation of the empire nor the stories about it can last forever. People are forgotten. Buildings are knocked down. Tastes and values change. And time, unceasingly, passes. In no story is that clearer than in 'The Old Incense Road', where in a strange deviation, it contains stories that resemble ones we readers know, starring people whose names we might recognise. It's the last story in the collection, and the only one where this happens, and is Gorodischer implying that her empire is our future, where we are long forgotten? As this is the only story without a storyteller, it's hard to say.

As a work in translation, it is excellent. The prose is clean and vivid, and the voice of the storyteller is distinct from the other characters we meet. He is probably the most well-developed character (although as I mentioned before, he is forever unnamed), giving readers insight into his thoughts on history and storytelling, verbally abusing his listeners, and even appearing as a character in 'Portrait of the Empress'. An argument could be made for *Kalpa Imperial* having multiple storytellers, but I like to think this is one man, on different days and in different moods, sharing what he believes to be the truth. Any flaws in his storytelling - in the book itself - are down to the publication and are easy to ignore.

In the end, *Kalpa Imperial* is like nothing I've ever read before. It is a complex work wrapped in the skin of a fairy tale and makes me want to explore not only more of Angélica Gorodischer's work but the work of other Argentinian genre writers. On her own, however, Gorodischer is the author of over a dozen works of sci-fi and fantasy fiction. In addition to *Kalpa Imperial*, only two others have been translated into English: *Trafalgar* in 2013 and *Prodigies* in 2015. \*

# HBO'S *GAME OF THRONES*<sup>®</sup> COLORING BOOK IS OUT NOW!



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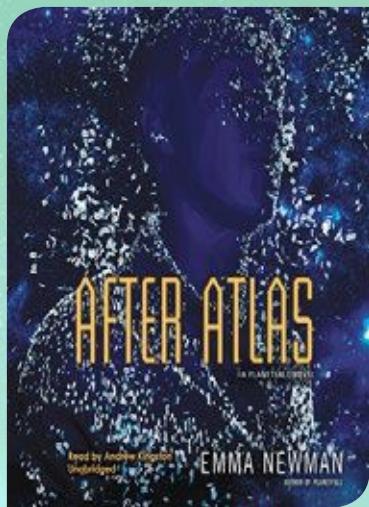
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# REVIEWS

THE LATEST RELEASES  
REVIEWED AND RATED



## AFTER ATLAS

**AUTHOR:** EMMA NEWMAN  
**PUBLISHER:** ROC  
**RELEASE DATE:** OUT NOW

After Atlas is the sequel of sorts to Emma Newman's previous science fiction novel, *Planetfall*. By which we mean that, though After Atlas is set in the same near-future

dystopia as *Planetfall*, it's a different story focusing on different characters.

Those expecting an encore to the critically acclaimed *Planetfall* will be both delighted and disappointed; this is a very different story, as you should expect. However, Newman's beautiful writing style and powerful use of structure is every bit as present here as it is in the first novel. After *Atlas* works entirely fine as a standalone; the thrills are still as strong regardless of your experience with the author's previous work.

The novel is set in a world in which mankind has pretty much run out of available resources. Governments have merged with corporate interests in such a way that they are now one and the same. The brightest and best people in the world have left; they got their heads together long ago to work out a way to leave the Earth via a ship called the *Atlas*, in the hope of meeting a newly discovered alien life.

After *Atlas*' main character is a chap called Carlos Moreno. His mother left to board the *Atlas* when he was a small boy, and his father couldn't cope with being abandoned. These tragic circumstances lead to Carlos becoming a highly trained detective for GovCorp. Unluckily for

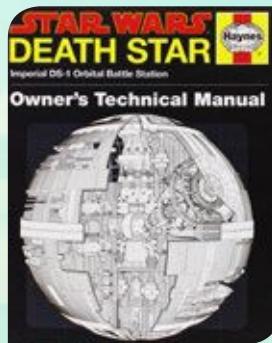
Carlos, the same training means that he's indentured to the state. Things make a turn for the worse when the earth-bound leader of the group that went away into space turns up dead. Carlos is the only one truly qualified to investigate the murder, yet at the same time the person with the most emotional baggage related to the case.

What Newman has created here is a lovely locked room mystery in which the stakes are incredibly high and the world is so very engaging. Whereas *Planetfall* felt like a ragged scream in the dark at times, *After Atlas* feels like a more rational response to a dying Earth. Carlos' emotional journey is rational and yet utterly gripping. This is a tale about bargaining with the untenable and finding the strength to keep going no matter what. The protagonist is a man with nothing, and yet somehow he still has something to lose. Emma Newman creates addictive page turners, and this is another fine example of that.

Expect to see this book on various award shortlists in 2017. It's that good.

ED FORTUNE

★★★★★ 10



## DEATH STAR MANUAL: DS-1 ORBITAL BATTLE STATION (OWNERS' WORKSHOP MANUAL)

**AUTHOR:** RYDER WINDHAM / **ARTIST:** CHRIS REIFF, CHRIS TREVAS / **PUBLISHER:** J H HAYNES & CO LTD / **RELEASE DATE:** OUT NOW

The Haynes Workshop Manuals have certainly moved along since this particular writer last bought one for my beloved old Ford Capri about thirty years ago. In their new incarnation, they cover the fictional vehicles of our beloved genre as well.

One of their latest offerings is the Owner's Workshop Manual for what is inarguably the most famous weapon of mass destruction in all of science fiction filmdom – the DS-1 Orbital Battle Station – and to our relief, many Bothans did NOT die to bring us this information.

It's a fascinating book for die-hard Star Wars fans, as the authors have painstakingly researched their source material, encyclopaedia, spin-off books, technical manuals and so forth to bring together a wealth of cross-referenced material which encompasses not only the original trilogy, but also the prequels and, perhaps most importantly, The Clone Wars.

Trivia seekers will enjoy the level of minutiae that graces these pages. From the Death Star's inspiration, the spherical detail of the Trade Federation Battleships, to its early incarnation as The Eye of Palpatine – an armed, travelling weapons platform cunningly disguised as an asteroid, to the Torpedo Spheres and the early prototype.

The bulk of the book covers the DS-1 in loving detail, from highly detailed cutaway drawings, showing the inside of the core reactor, to the small thermal exhaust port, left unshielded, that was to prove the mechanical

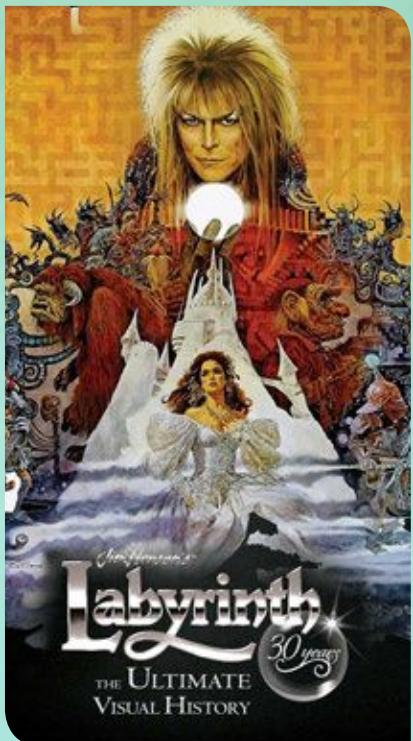
horror's ultimate undoing. Details about crew quarters, recreation facilities where (incredibly) the Stormtroopers could hone their shooting skills, tractor beams, TIE fighter hangars, and each of the DS-1's 24 sectors are all here, including schematics of the laser cannons that bristle the ship's surface level, and a section on the superlaser that obliterated Alderaan.

Naturally, having built a weapon this big and destructive – and lost it, the Empire would proceed to build bigger and better with the awe-inspiring Death Star II, which is also given a section in the book. Apart from its size being bigger (a diameter of 160km, against the DS-1's 120km) with an even bigger superlaser capable of recharging in minutes rather than hours, the main differences were that the thermal port vulnerability was taken care of and it was protected by a planetary shield generator from the moon of Endor.

Star Wars fans will love to examine this book in every minute detail – it's the ultimate argument solver regarding the Death Star.

ROBIN PIERCE

★★★★★ 7



### JIM HENSON'S LABYRINTH: THE ULTIMATE VISUAL HISTORY

AUTHOR: PAULA M. BLOCK, TERRY J. ERDMANN  
PUBLISHER: TITAN BOOKS  
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

As Jim Henson's iconic *Labyrinth* celebrates its 30th anniversary, Titan Books has given fans the simply outstanding *Jim Henson's Labyrinth: The Ultimate Visual History*. What we have here is something that is the very definition of definitive, and something that any and all fans of the movie should be making room for on their bookshelves.

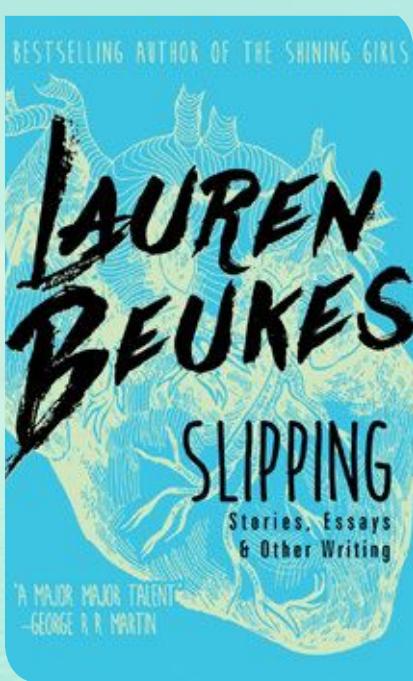
To give a full insight into this new release, here we have a book that brings together absolutely everything you could ever want to know about Jim Henson's utterly fabulous film. The movie itself? Well, surely you're all up to speed on that by now, but, in its most basic terms, Henson's 1986 film told the story of Jennifer Connolly's Sarah on a quest through an otherworldly maze as she looks to rescue her infant brother from the hands of David Bowie's Jareth, the Goblin King. Full of puppets and lavish landscapes, the film brought a charm and uniqueness that has seen it remain a favourite of many to this very day, despite ultimately flopping during its initial cinema release.

With *The Ultimate Visual History*, Paula M. Block and Terry J. Erdmann have delivered something truly special. Complete with a foreword by Toby Froud (*Labyrinth*'s kidnapped infant) and an introduction by Brian Henson (son of the legendary Jim, and someone who worked as a puppeteer on the film himself), there's so much information here to take in that, a little like Sarah in the movie, you'll initially feel overwhelmed at what lies ahead of you.

Crammed in this mesmerising and beautiful book is just so much detail, with every *Labyrinth* topic imaginable covered in incomparable depth. And as well as quotes and interviews from all of the film's key players, from Jim Henson to designer Brian Froud to David Bowie to Jennifer Connolly, there's a look back at the film and its concepts from the very foundations and initial ideas and sketches that would go on to ultimately give us the iconic *Labyrinth*. Then, arguably the finest element of this flawless release, there are the inserts dotted throughout the book that are copies of Henson's original notes, production documents, and blueprints and artwork that would eventually come to life on the big screen. The images and illustrations that hold the book together make this release something that is easy to pick up and be inspired by, but there's also such substance in the text that this is a book that you will never get bored of delving into, with a new nugget of information always waiting around the corner (such as that the likes of Mick Jagger, Prince, Roger Daltrey, and Michael Jackson were also considered for the role of Jareth).

Quite simply, this book is a must-have for anybody with even a passing interest in *Labyrinth*, and it's a staggering piece of memorabilia that will keep you coming back for more as well as reigniting the love and affection that you have for Jim Henson's cult classic movie.

ANDREW POLLARD



### SLIPPING: STORIES, ESSAYS & OTHER WRITING

AUTHOR: LAUREN BEUKES  
PUBLISHER: TACHYON  
RELEASE DATE: 29TH NOVEMBER

The word 'edgy' is bandied about so much in reviews as to become almost cliché, but, Lauren Beukes's recent collection has stories that happen right at the edge. Beukes, the award-winning South African writer, has authored novels, graphic novels, and plays. Her new collection *Slipping* brings together over a decade's worth of short stories, non-fiction, essays and vignettes.

The short stories in this book detail the sort of things that sometimes happen in the peripheral – from the lovelorn and slightly creepy traffic warden ('Parking') to the survival tactics needed in absolute poverty ('Smileys'). 'Ghost Girl' occurs on the liminal edge of life and death as an architect is haunted by a teenage girl. Beukes has a fine touch for satire in the pop culture Selfie world of 'Pop Tarts' and the benefits of corporate branding in 'Branded'.

While it's difficult to choose the stand-outs from the collection, the titular piece 'Slipping' is astonishing: a tale focussing in on South African runner Pearl Ntseko brutally damaged in an accident and now biologically and bionically enhanced. The race that Pearl and other young women (alive and dead) are forced to participate in is treated as a freak show only of interest to rubber neckers, pharmaceutical companies and the military. You're left wondering about Pearl long after your eyes fall on the final sentence.

Slipping is a dizzying array of stories, a greatest hits from a prolific

and imaginative writer. There's a mash of scenarios and genres from alternative histories to Manga, cyberpunk to feminist fairy tale. It's kick-ass speculative fiction with brains and heart.

While the short stories outbalance the non-fiction pieces, Beukes's journalism has a zippy, thoughtful, and compelling style to it. Her passion for social justice shines through in her articles about South Africa and women. We defy you not to get all the feels when you read the letter to her five-year-old daughter. This section also demonstrates underlying themes that inform *Moxylan*, *Zoo City*, *The Shining Girls* and recent novel *Broken Monsters*. For budding writers, this will give you a valuable insight into the writing process; you can see how non-fiction seeps into fiction and how short stories can be developed into longer pieces. If you're inspired, you should definitely slip on the muse-skin gloves from the opening story and try typing!

Beukes' writing is incomparable, but if you haven't read her work and love writers like Jeff Noon (*Vurt*, *Automated Alice*), and William Gibson (*Neuromancer*) mixed with the unflinching ballsiness of writers like Emma Jane Unsworth (*Animals*), then you'll absolutely love Lauren Beukes.

JENNIE BAILEY





## IRON MAN: THE GAUNTLET

AUTHOR: EOIN COLFER

PUBLISHER: EGMONT

RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Irish author Eoin Colfer is known for his jaunty, humorous style, as utilised in the likes of the Artemis Fowl series and the sixth Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy novel (taking over from the late, great Douglas Adams). Given that, he is a natural choice to translate the most quip-happy superhero out there to the novel format – the invincible Iron Man, as made famous by Robert Downey Jr. on the big screen.

Fans of both the author and the character will not be disappointed, then, as *The Gauntlet* wastes no opportunity for squeezing in a jokey aside or comedic tangent. In the style of the aforementioned Adams, Colfer roves from viewpoint to viewpoint and takes on the role of wry omniscient narrator. It's a fitting technique as it somewhat recalls Stan Lee's captions and editor's commentary in the classic Marvel comics.

Plotwise, *The Gauntlet* is content to play with familiar story beats and as such doesn't really offer anything we haven't seen before. While attending an international eco-summit in Dublin, Stark is captured by a bunch of terrorists (wouldn't you know it!) who want to use his own technology for more warlike purposes. It's a plot that recalls just about every Iron Man movie, but that doesn't matter too much, as it moves along at enough of

a break-neck speed to keep you involved. There is a subplot about Tony coming to terms with his distant relationship with his father (again, reminiscent of *Iron Man 2*) but mostly this is a full-on action adventure that doesn't pause for breath.

Also, if you want to get nerdy about it, the novel is definitely set in the continuity of the Marvel Cinematic Universe – with references to events and characters from the movies scattered throughout. Fans of Iron Man lore will likewise be pleased with the choice of villain, which we won't spoil here even though it becomes clear very quickly. That said, don't expect the more fleshed-out kind of villain we get in the films but rather a cackling, Saturday morning cartoon type of baddie. That's not so much a criticism, as it is clear that this is a deliberate self-aware move from Colfer.

On the whole, as long as you don't expect *The Gauntlet* to explore new dimensions of the hero, it is an enjoyable light read. Younger superhero lovers will no doubt be enthralled and adult Iron Man fans will likely get a kick out of it as well.

CHRISTIAN BONE



deserves a similarly crafted book to mark a decade of its existence. This volume is sumptuous, to say the least, from the get go, from the beautifully embossed cover on through. The paper is an exquisite heavy stock.

Trivia abounds from del Toro's foreword, where he reveals that *Pan's Labyrinth* was the second toughest film to shoot in his experience (the toughest was *Mimic*) and is one of his three personal favourite films of the ones he has made - *Devil's Backbone* and *Crimson Peak* being the others.

With lessons learned in the disciplines of make-up and digital effects from *Blade II* and a greater sense of visual construction from his experience on *Hellboy*, he set out to create a whole new mythology.

Creating a brand new fairy tale with all its trappings, locales, and inhabitants, is a massive undertaking,

as we learn from the book. From del Toro himself to the producers, the director of photography and several of the stars, we gain a valuable insight into the trials and tribulations of bringing this project

to the screen. It was, after all, a major project, budgeted at a modest \$19 million, filmed in Spain and Mexico that contained creatures and effects that were uncommon in the film industries of those countries with everything having to be built from scratch. Some of the creative decisions were born out of a need to save some money due to the constraints of the budget. A prime example detailed is that the fairies in the film are bald, purely because the ability to create believable CGI hair wasn't there yet and further development would've incurred extra cost.

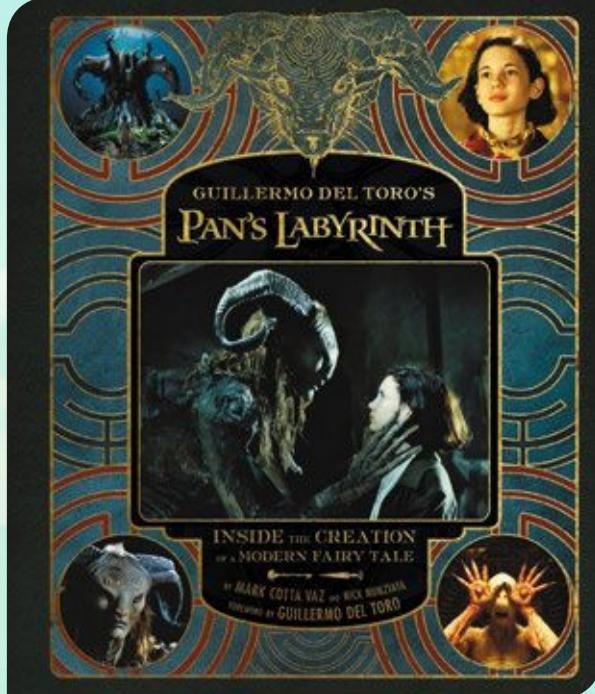
The illustrations that accompany the text are just bewilderingly beautiful. As well as the high resolution photos, giving the reader the opportunity to pore over every detail of The Faun, step by step photographs show the stages of make-up being applied, as well as the electronics housed in the headpiece that allowed some of the facial features to be puppeteered.

One of the most fearsome creatures of recent years is del Toro's Pale Man, sitting at his banquet table. The story of his creation, along with production sketches and concept drawings, is all here in detail.

There are full sketches that can be pulled out, from simple line drawings to complex works of art showing every minute detail of not only creatures but also carved arches, furniture and wall etchings ensuring that no facet of this amazing film is left unexplored.

This is definitely a book that should be in every genre fan's stocking this Christmas. Well worth the cover price.

ROBIN PIERCE



## GUILLERMO DEL TORO'S PAN'S LABYRINTH: INSIDE THE CREATION OF A MODERN FAIRY TALE

AUTHORS: NICK NUNZIATA, MARK COTTA VAZ / PUBLISHER: TITAN BOOKS / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Incredible as it might seem, ten years have passed since the release of Guillermo del Toro's masterpiece modern fairy tale *Pan's Labyrinth*. The film is, in every way, a meticulously crafted visual treat. So, it

as we learn from the book. From del Toro himself to the producers, the director of photography and several of the stars, we gain a valuable insight into the trials and tribulations of bringing this project

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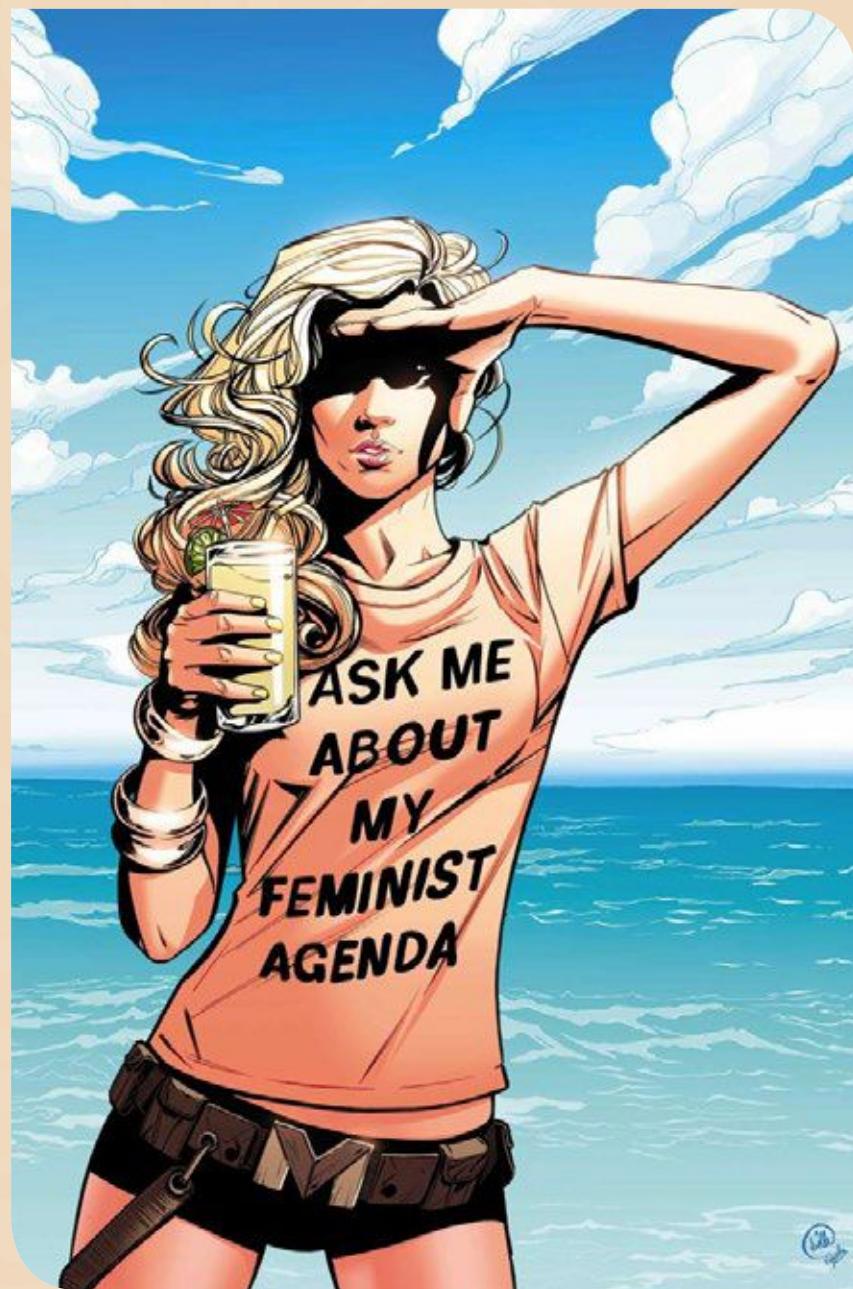
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# VIEW FROM THE WATCHTOWER

GARETH EVANS PULLS MONITOR DUTY TO BRING YOU THE LATEST FROM THE WORLD OF COMIC BOOKS



**S**adly this month's *View from the Watchtower* does not begin on a happy note. Recently, Chelsea Cain, the writer of *Mockingbird*, left Twitter after being the target of online harassment. This aggravation arose after *Mockingbird* ended with the titular character depicted wearing

a T-shirt that reads 'ask me about my feminist agenda' on the book's cover. Chelsea Cain's story is one that has become all too common on Twitter, and it is something that needs to be addressed.

Whatever you think of Cain, whatever you think of *Mockingbird*, harassment isn't the answer. The people who

attacked her have only demeaned themselves, and the comic books that we all claim to love. If you wonder why I chose to open this month's column in such way, I would like to remind you that it is only thanks to the people behind the comic books that we have them to enjoy in the first place. What happens to those individuals and how they are treated is just as important to the industry as what happens in the comic books themselves.

Now, onto the news. The Justice League and the Power Rangers are going to have a crossover. This is not a drill, this is really going to happen. The series is due to launch in January 2017 and I cannot wait to get my hands on a copy. Not much has been announced at the time of writing, but news like this makes me all the more glad that it's now my job to write about comic books.

A common staple of comic books for a while now has been the miniseries. Of course, the idea is nothing new but it feels like they are now more popular than ever. Dynamite Comics is currently publishing a range of James Bond miniseries, and have announced that they will be releasing a Felix Leiter miniseries to join them. For those readers unfamiliar with the character, he is a CIA agent who has appeared in a couple of Bond stories. The first issue is due in January 2017, and sees Felix operating independently from the CIA.

DC has also announced two new miniseries this month, titled *The Odyssey of the Amazons* and *The Fall and Rise of Captain Atom* (the latter seeking to provide answers as to why no one has seen Captain Atom in a while). Out of the two the one I am looking forward to is *The Odyssey of the Amazons*. As a people, the Amazons were not treated well in the New 52 and the backstory established by this comic could go towards correcting that. According to DC, the series will focus on Amazons 'set[ting] out on a globe-spanning quest to find others of their kind'. Both of these series will last for six issues and will debut in January 2017. Last month, I joked that December 2016 would be an expensive time to be a comic book fan, but based on all the titles that are coming our way it doesn't look like there is such a thing as a cheap month! Even *Back to the Future* is getting another miniseries in the form of *Biff to the Future*, detailing the world created by Biff in *Back to The*



*Future Part II.* Can you guess when it comes out? That's right, January 2017.

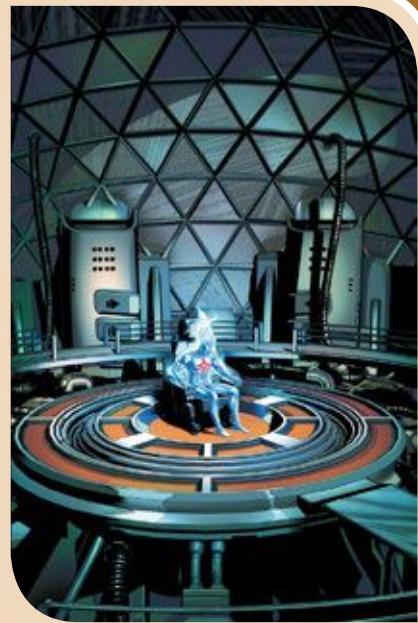
But we've covered the comics of that month enough this issue. Let's look at the comics of this month. Firstly, I should make a correction for something that I wrote in last month's *View from the Watchtower* (because I don't think I can convince you that it was an imposter). I stated that a character had been killed off in Issue Five of *Civil War II*. That wasn't true, it was just a vision of his death. Issue Six is spent showing the reactions of the characters to the visions, and how they feel they should handle the character prophesised to commit the murder they saw in the vision.

For all of Marvel's talk of wanting to pit hero against hero so that they can have a conflict without a right answer, they don't seem to be very good at actually delivering one. Captain Marvel's position has become increasingly tenuous, and without giving too much away, it looks like her aims have been entirely hijacked by Hydra, with Captain America playing both sides off of each other. I don't think you can think of a conflict as having no right answer if one side is constantly shown to be objectively wrong and being manipulated by an even more extreme variety of Nazi. On the bright side, it feels like this story is gearing towards the conclusion of the 'Captain America working for Hydra' story, and we might get to see why anyone thought it was a good idea.

The X-Men aren't having a particularly good time of it either at the moment. Two out of four issues of *Death of X* have been released, and it looks like Scott Summers is attempting to lead a mutant war against Inhumans. Just as with *Civil War II*, this series displays a shocking lack of judgment on behalf of its characters. As a representative of the X-Men, Storm seems to actually reach a reasonable solution to the problem



of Terrigen Mists (the substance that activates an Inhumans' powers) being toxic to mutants. This lasts for about a minute before Scott blows it apart by announcing to the world that the Inhumans are a menace and that the X-Men will be coming after them. If this series does lead to the death of Cyclops, I honestly don't think that I will mind at this point. Ironically, Cyclops seems fated to the same character assassination as that of Xavier before he killed him off. At least with Cyclops dead, the writers can't turn him into any more of an irrational extremist than they already have. Fans who feel let down by the current direction of the X-Men may feel comforted to know that Marvel is planning a more cheerful course with the upcoming *X-Men: Blue* and *X-Men Gold*, but only time will tell if they follow through or not. After all,

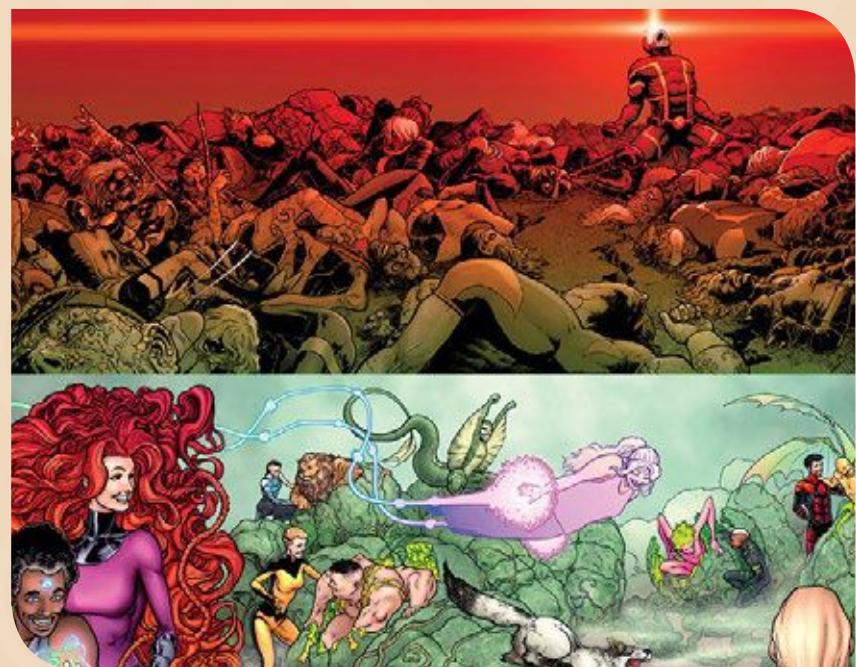


promises of returning to a brighter, more heroic era were made about 'Heroic Age' and it didn't seem to take long for that to go away.

Since the conclusion of the *Injustice* prequel comics, you may have wondered if any more comics set in that universe would be on their way. This month saw the start of *Injustice Year Zero*, a series that tells the story of the game from Harley Quinn's point of view.

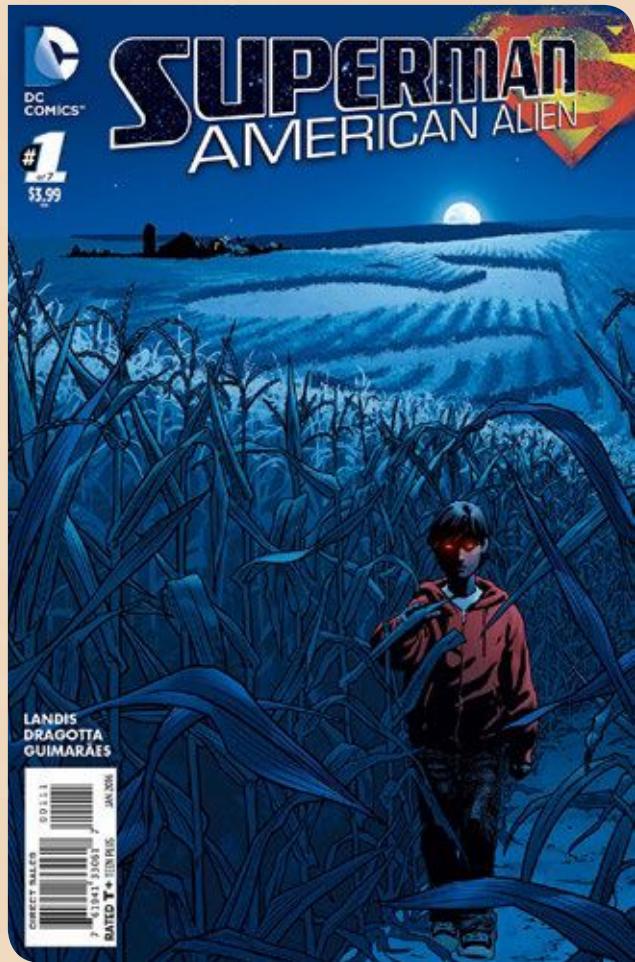
And I know I said I was done with upcoming stories but I wanted to end on a happy note: Batwoman is getting another comic book series, and fans can look forward to it launching in February 2017. Personally speaking, I can't wait. +

Gareth Evans can be contacted at: [gareth.evans@starburstmagazine.com](mailto:gareth.evans@starburstmagazine.com) and tweeted @OneTrueGareth



# REVIEWS

THE LATEST COMIC  
BOOK RELEASES  
REVIEWED AND RATED



## SUPERMAN: AMERICAN ALIEN

WRITER: MAX LANDIS / ARTIST: VARIOUS / PUBLISHER: DC COMICS / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Superman is arguably the greatest superhero of all time, as well as being the most important character in comic book history. He was the starting point for superheroes in general and became the archetype for us to aspire to; he represents the hope and compassion that humanity is capable of, a symbol of hope in our darkest of times. So many great writers have translated this core philosophy and mythology in many great works, like Mark Waid with Birthright and Grant Morrison with All-Star Superman. Now Max Landis has joined that club, as American Alien arguably goes down as one of the greatest Superman stories of all time.

There are criticisms out there about Superman being unreliable due to how over-powered he is or because he's too much of a good person and is subsequently boring. Landis' revisionist origin story sideswipes those criticisms easily, as he delves deep into the early years of Clark Kent, instead of going the easy route of exploring Krypton and its imminent destruction

or Superman's first duel with Lex Luthor. This is a tale about the Man behind the Superman. That allows Landis to delve into Clark's emotional struggle and evolution over the course of the story, as well as his physical growth as Clark learns to harness his powers for the first time. We also see Jonathan and Martha Kent's fears and aspirations as they come to terms with being the parents of this superhuman, and you do get a sense that Clark took a lot of the compassion and optimism from the people who raised him.

What's so brilliant about American Alien is that Landis is almost telling a standalone tale in each of the seven issues, yet when all are combined, they manage to convey a strong, insightful portrait of a man who's trying to find his place in the world while becoming the symbol of hope and justice. Along his journey to becoming Superman, he comes across characters that help define him in years to come; we see the blossoming romance between Clark and Lois, a hilarious spin on the Batman/Superman dynamic, and the first encounters between Superman and Lex. Surprisingly, Landis creates a heartfelt bond between Clark and Barbara Ann Minerva (the woman who becomes Cheetah), and it is actually poignant and adds real depth to both characters. Landis' terrific characterisation works well across the board and perfectly taps into Clark's human side without losing any of the core aspects about his character.

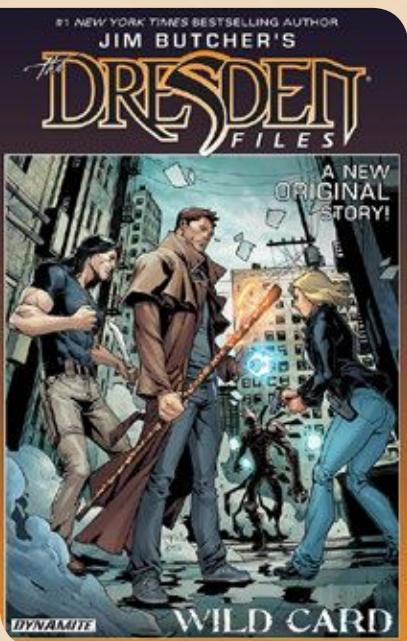
Despite the fact that there are many artists involved, each and every art style complements the story perfectly and it's clear a lot of attention and care was involved when choosing the selected artists. Artists like Tommy Lee Edwards, Jae Lee, and Jock are surprising choices in terms of drawing a more personal Superman story, yet they manage to convey the emotions beautifully. Nick Dragotta, in particular, makes pages flow majestically, especially during the sequence where a young Clark is shown sweeping through the Kansas cornfields for the first time. Both Joelle Jones and Jonathan Case do great at landing the narrative's sentimentality perfectly, and firing on all cylinders as usual is Francis Manapul as he depicts Clark's first ever battle with Parasite. Special plaudits must also go to Ryan Cook's eye-catching covers, which instantly grab the reader's attention, all amounting to a gorgeous collection.

Superman: American Alien is a terrific, poignant coming-of-age story about Clark Kent's evolution from a confused farm boy from Kansas to the legendary Man of Steel. Despite the awesome array of powers he possesses, this story shows just how normal and relatable Clark is, whatever the naysayers may say, whilst also conveying perfectly the character's fundamental decency, kindness and optimism. If only the DC Films nowadays would understand that...

RYAN POLLARD

★★★★★ 9





### THE DRESDEN FILES: WILD CARD

**WRITER:** JIM BUTCHER, MARK POWERS / **ARTIST:** CARLOS GOMEZ / **PUBLISHER:** DYNAMITE / **RELEASE DATE:** OUT NOW

A spate of murders on the streets of Chicago and subsequent mutual accusations sets the police, the criminal organisation of gangster baron John Marcone and the vampires of the White Court against one another. As retaliatory skirmishes break out between the power factions, intrepid

wizard PI Harry Dresden must uncover who is orchestrating the chaos before the city erupts into an all-out war zone.

As The Dresden Files series progresses, it becomes less straightforward to dip in and out of the saga, and despite Wild Card being chronologically set far earlier in the series than the 'present', it's still written with the assumption that the reader is already familiar with the main players and the rules of magic by which its world operates. However, the lack of space taken up by explaining who everyone is and the strengths and weaknesses of various supernatural races leaves more room for story, and allows readers to figure out possibilities of what's going on without having the required information spelled out to them.

It's inevitable that comic adaptations of novel characters won't completely match up with how every reader pictures them, but liberties have really been taken with a couple of them. The rough-and-tumble Murphy is drawn as though she were some elfin model, while Molly is interpreted as a wasp-waisted Suicide Girl, tacitly implying that the sturdily built young woman the books describe couldn't possibly translate to someone as attractive as their writing portrays her. The improbable number of beautiful women who populate Harry's life is further highlighted with appearances from Lara the White Court queen and high fae the Leanansidhe, both as full-figured, cleavage-sporting and malevolently sensual as you'd expect of the powerful entities who are as malicious as they are seductive towards Harry.

The novels are invariably told from Harry's sole viewpoint, but here the multiple perspectives give a little welcome variation in reactions to the situation, including a

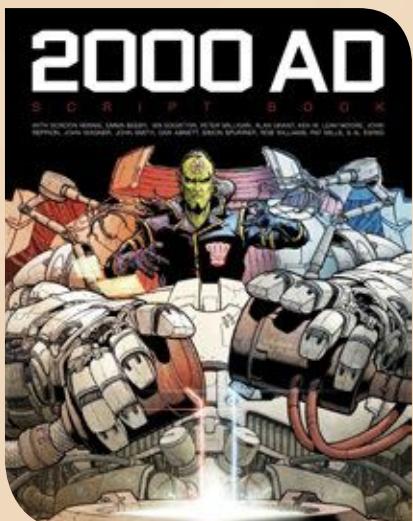
rather touching sequence where Murphy remembers being a little girl and spending time with her now-deceased father.

Butcher has many times freely admitted his love of torturing Harry, and it will come as no surprise to learn of the physical suffering the wizard is put through in the course of his investigation, but also again establishes his indomitable will to see an investigation through to its bitter end.

One for existing fans of the series rather than newcomers, in the realm of Dresden comics Wild Card is a vast improvement over the disappointing Down Town, but reaches neither the satisfying mystery of Ghoul Goblin nor the perilous excitement of War Cry. If nothing else, it's a decent enough stopgap to partially slake impatient desires for the long-awaited next novel to be completed.

ANDREW MARSHALL

★★★★★ 7



### 2000 AD SCRIPT BOOK

**WRITER:** VARIOUS / **ARTIST:** VARIOUS / **PUBLISHER:** REBELLION / **RELEASE DATE:** OUT NOW

Fast approaching its fortieth anniversary, 2000 AD is an iconic part of the British comics industry and has launched the careers of many incredible writers. But unlike writing for the screen, which has been

dissected over and over, the work of these comics writers is relatively unstudied. The 2000 AD Script Book aims to remedy that, reprinting instalments from various recent strips alongside their original scripts.

This approach allows for much insight into the creative processes behind the works of many popular writers, from longstanding 2000 AD legends like John Wagner and Pat Mills to the stars of today like Al Ewing and Robbie Morrison. It's particularly interesting – perhaps more so than reading film scripts – because the comics industry has no set format or style, and so each script varies from the next.

Some, like Wagner and Mills, are very terse, providing the minimal information needed to tell the story and allowing the artist to work out the details and layout. Others are more prescriptive, going into detail with character descriptions and panel compositions. And others are more conversational and jokey – Simon Spurrier's script for Lobster Random is a delight to read, conveying the anarchic tone of the story even in his directions.

This variety teaches an important lesson that a comics script is a conversation with the artist, all part of a collaboration to make the final work as good as possible; studying all the styles involved will help budding writers find their own style – and reassurance

that they're not doing it 'wrong'!

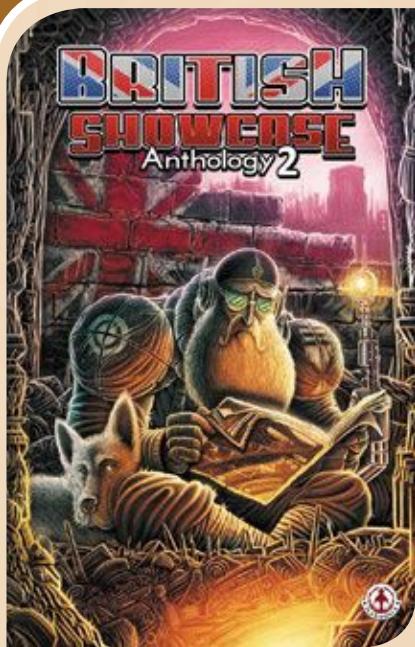
As well as enthusiastic writers, this book is also a great read for 2000 AD fans to dip in and out of, in order to learn more about how their favorite series came to be. The fifteen comics covered are all from the past two or three years, so anyone wanting to see scripts from classic Alan Moore or Grant Morrison comics, for example, will be disappointed, but there's nevertheless a great range of characters covered – from Judge Dredd to Sláine via Durham Red, Bad Company, Brass Sun, and much more.

Readers interested in the art of comics who aren't long-time 2000 AD readers may be a little confused by some, as, for example, the Shakara instalment gives us Part Five of a rather complex story without much in the way of context, but several others are Part Ones or single-instalment stories, so shouldn't provide that problem.

The 2000 AD Script Book is a fascinating insight into the galaxy's greatest comic, a source of inspiration for anyone wanting to get cracking on their own scripts, and a fantastically presented reprint of some excellent strips. Gaze into the scripts of Dredd!

KIERON MOORE

★★★★★ 9



## **BRITISH SHOWCASE ANTHOLOGY – VOLUME 2**

WRITER: VARIOUS / ARTIST: VARIOUS / PUBLISHER: MARKOSIA / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Anyone who's visited one of the many comic-cons held across Britain in recent years will know that there's a hell of a lot of independent comic book creators on the scene, and so it's difficult for readers to know where to start. The second volume of British Showcase Anthology, from publisher Markosia and editor Adam Cheal, aims to

help out with this problem by sampling the works of many such creators.

There are twelve strips of around six pages each, all from different writers and artists. What immediately stands out is the sheer variety on offer, in terms of both stories told and art styles. There's Horror, Sci-Fi, Comedy, a Western, a couple of interesting takes on the superhero genre, and a few more surprises. Plus, the volume is careful to put bios of every creator in front of their strip, so that the reader can seek out more work from those behind their favourites.

As with any collection, there are inevitably a couple of stories that don't match the quality of the others, with the occasional obvious twist, some clunky dialogue, and one or two artists with clearly less well developed styles. However, as the purpose of the book is to celebrate and promote indie creators, we'd like to spend the rest of this review highlighting the ones we liked most.

Red Apple, from award-winning illustrator Simo, is a quirky tale of an elderly scavenger searching for his identity, with a sad twist but a happier ending. It's remarkable for Simo's distinctive and evocative art style, also seen on the cover of the volume.

The Heathen Masses, from writer Chris Tresson, artist Paul Moore, colourist Adam Brown and letterer Rob Jones, follows a young guy who joins up to the goat-worshipping Cult of Azazel, after hearing about them on the Internet. It's a horror comedy with witty dialogue and a wicked twist.

And (Secret) Identity, from writer Chris Sides, artist Kier Gill, colourist Aljoša Tomić

and letterer Ken Reynolds, is a twisted take on the superhero genre, with the Superman-esque figure not as heroic as he first seems. The art wouldn't look out of place in a Marvel publication, and the story feels like it could easily be expanded into a full series.

And that's a common feeling with many of the strips in this anthology – they're a teaser for these creators' work, and there's so much more from them to be enjoyed. We've singled out these three stories but could easily praise many more – sure, there are a couple of weak links, but the very high overall quality of British Showcase Anthology – Volume 2 proves there's a lot of talent in the indie comics scene.

ANDREW MARSHALL

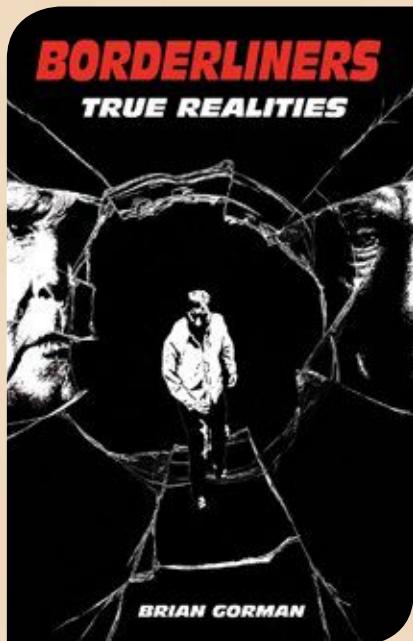
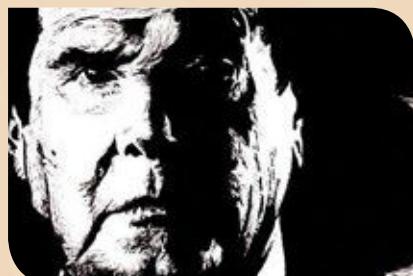


better understanding of the characters and how he created this work. As an example, Brian explains that the grumpy teddy bear in the story was found in a bargain bin in a charity shop.

Brian performs a great juggling act that throws up all manner of ideas and themes about our place in a multitude of borderline realities and unrealities. His hero, John Marley transverses these spaces, illuminating how consciousness and perception is a free-flowing entity that we have to negotiate to form our own identity and sense of place in the universe.

Profound, obscure, weird, confusing, humorous, and entertaining.

NIGEL WATSON



## **BORDERLINERS: TRUE REALITIES**

WRITER & ARTIST: BRIAN GORMAN / PUBLISHER: INVISIBLE SIX LTD / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

This is literally a black and white descent into the strange world of corrupt espionage agencies, multiple realities/dimensions and a serving of Sir Roger Moore, Sir Ian McKellen, and Elvis (I kid you not).

Gorman's graphic novel takes a nod at the labyrinthine world of The Prisoner, the trauma of what it's like to be mentally manipulated as expressed in the Jason Bourne movies and the tenuous relationship between reality and mind as highlighted in the works of Philip K. Dick.

The style is gritty and realistic, plus it harks back to the savage days of punk and even references Frank Hampson (1918 - 1985) the creator of Dan Dare for no other reason than there is a blue plaque dedicating his memory two streets from a point of action in this story.

Secret agent John Marley is on a nightmare journey through the streets of Northern England, where nothing seems black and white (pardon the pun). Place and time shifts, he is locked up and tortured, he's recruited into a team run by a part-human, part-cat, and two guinea pigs.

If you get confused (never?) there is a handy Q & A between Brian Gorman and his publisher SM Worsey, which tells us about his inspirations, how the story has evolved from a straightforward action film script over the last twenty years and it gives you a

# Pokey-Con

Pokey-Con - A handy guide to the wonders you may see out in convention land. Cut out, collect and keep and use these to identify your Pokey-Con creature.

Note: Do not attempt to trade in convention goers for candy. It is frowned upon



51

Shortest Stormtrooper



Rarity: Common

Not the best Stormtrooper in the world, but certainly the most enthusiastic. Stormtroopers are a pretty common sight at your local comic con, but the Shortest Stormtrooper doesn't let a little thing like an ill-fitting costume get in the way of fun.

Favourite Drink: Blue Milk

Special Abilities: Never hit a thing. Infectious Enthusiasm. Fame: 4, Weirdness: 4, Height: 3, Costume: 7, Power: 3, Crunchiness: 3

20

Makeshift Dalek



Rarity: Common

Sometimes you just have to make do with what you have. Daleks are basically an egg whisk, a sink plunger and bravado. We are sure it will be fine.

Favourite Drink: Redbull

Special Abilities: Make Souffles. Eggs. Stir. A minute. Fame: 3, Weirdness: 7, Regret: 7, Costume: 2, Power: 4, Costume: 4

22

The Convenient TARDIS



Rarity: Uncommon

Conventions rarely have much in the way of personal space. Luckily, some helpful soul has left a convenient big blue cupboard to hide in. Perfect for last minute costume adjustments. And other things.

Favourite Food: Doctor Who Cosplayers

Special Notes: It is not soundproof

Power: 5, Hide: 9, Embarrassment potential: 10, Regret: 8, Silliness: 10

49

Horde of Jawa



Rarity: Very Common

One moment you're minding your own business, the next, you're being dragged away to be sold swapped for a power converter faster than you can say oodini.

Favourite Food: Whatever you're eating

Special Abilities: Examine Item. Acquire Item. Annoy Stormtroopers.

Power: 2, Shiftiness: 9, Weirdness: 7, Height: 2, Crunchiness: 4, Silliness: 10

Credits:  
Art: Andy Mason ([blog.andysdrawings.co.uk](http://blog.andysdrawings.co.uk))  
Text and Concept: Ed Fortune  
Layout and Design: Mike Smith

# ANIME-NATION

A MONTHLY  
ROUND UP FROM  
THE WORLD OF ANIME  
AND MANGA FROM  
LITTLEANIMEBLOG.COM'S  
DOMINIC CUTHBERT



## FULLMETAL ALCHEMIST Sharpshooter Inspires Olympic Candidate

Riza Hawkeye kicks all kinds of butt, her rifle marksmanship ever true to her name. But would that inspire us to do any physical activity, eh? However, one plucky Olympic candidate, Miki Nishikawa, has taken the sharpshooter's example and put it to inspiring use. At the age of 17, she's aiming for Tokyo 2020. Nishikawa admitted that some may think it's strange to compare yourself to a manga character. But she thought if Riza Hawkeye could be so cool when she fires her rifle, then she could aspire to do the same. We'll be cheering her on come the Summer Olympics.

## Future Key Character Hidden in Re:ZERO Episode

Whispers from the realms of *Re:ZERO* suggest that fans go back to Episode 11, where a flaxen-haired maid by the name of Frederica Baumann made a brief appearance in a flashback. Many of us won't remember her, but she has a significant role to play in the latest light novel volumes. From the fourth arc, she'll start being more proactive in the story. Illustrator Shinichirou Otsuka recently took to Twitter to share his designs for the character, and we can't wait to see more.

## India and Pakistan Contemplate DORAEMON ban

**Doraemon**, the beloved blue robot kitty, has been entertaining Japanese fans for five decades, but in India and Pakistan campaigns are calling to banish the character from their TV screens. Social conservatives have called the anime out for corrupting children and encouraging misbehaviour. In his native country, the feline from the 22nd century has been praised as an example of technology's positive power. But his critics feel that when children see him use these gizmos, they're more likely to depend on others instead of solving their own problems.

## Shueisha Set Up New DRAGON BALL Department

Shonen Jump publishers Shueisha Inc. has set up a new department dubbed the '**Dragon Ball Room**' focused solely on developing Akira Toriyama's revered IP. Akio Iyoku, editor-in-chief of V Jump magazine (home of the **Dragon Ball Super** manga) is leading the department, which is working towards providing new content ideas for the series. Their aim is to optimise and expand the brand, and Iyoku clarified that the department is 'only thinking about **Dragon Ball**'. Kame-hame-hyped!

## ONE PIECE Creator Supports Kumamoto Quake Recovery Project

The Kumamoto earthquakes devastated Kyushu in April, killing 120 people. They tore through several of the region's iconic landmarks, including Kumamoto Castle, which had stood since the 15th century. Kumamoto City itself is also known for being the birthplace of mangaka Eiichiro Oda. And so, Oda has stood in support of the '**One Piece** Kumamoto Recovery Project', gathering Straw Hats nationwide in aid of the people and places affected. All who donate over 10,000 yen to Kumamoto Castle between November 1st, 2016 and March 31st, 2017 will receive an original item of **One Piece** memorabilia.

## Ghibli's Chief Colour Designer of 30 Years Passes Away

Studio Ghibli colour designer Michyo Yasuda has sadly passed away at 77 from an undisclosed illness. Yasuda spent a long career with Ghibli as chief of the ink and paint division, joining for **Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind**. Before that she worked at Toei Doga (later Toei Animation), where she first met Isao Takahata and Hayao Miyazaki. She would work for Ghibli for 30 years, contributing to classics such as **Spirited Away**, **Princess Mononoke**, **My Neighbour Totoro**, and **Howl's Moving Castle**. As a Japan Movie Critics Awards' Lifetime Achievement Award-winner, it's no exaggeration to say Yasuda's importance is more than could be summarised here.

## Leiji Matsumoto's GUN FRONTIER Manga Rebooted

Leiji Matsumoto, the esteemed creator of **Space Battleship Yamato**, **Captain Harlock** and **Galaxy Express 999**, has had his 1972 manga series **Gun Frontier** rebooted by Yuzuru Shimazaki. The new series, which launched in Akita Shoten's Monthly Champion RED, is set on a wasteland planet and follows our familiar space cowboy Harlock as he journeys across the land with his samurai sword-wielding close friend Tochirou. But the story begins when they cross paths with a girl named Sinunora.



THE LATEST ANIME  
RELEASES REVIEWED  
AND RATED

# REVIEWS



## MISS HOKUSAI

DVD + BD / CERT: 12 / DIRECTOR: KEIICHI HARA / SCREENPLAY: MIHO MARUO / STARRING: ANNE WATANABE, SHION SHIMIZU, YUTAKA MATSHIGE / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

O-Ei is the beautiful, strong-willed daughter of Katsushika Hokusai, the ukiyo-e master made famous in the western world thanks to his often-copied woodblock print 'The Great Wave off Kanagawa'. O-Ei and her father live and work in a single room in the city that will one day be called Tokyo and their art is their only focus – they don't clean, they don't tidy, and if their surroundings get too dirty they simply move on to somewhere else.

It is the Edo period, and O-Ei is an anachronism. Outside her father's studio, she is the polite, demure young lady that Japanese society expects. Inside, she smokes a pipe, isn't afraid to express her feelings, and works hard at perfecting her own art. Her specialities are erotic drawings and portraits of the courtesans who ply their trade behind the paper screens of Yoshiwara, the red light district.

Hokusai isn't an easy man to like. Even O-Ei describes him as a 'nut' and a 'cry-baby', but although the words they exchange are few, the love and respect they feel for each other is palpable. What isn't so easy to forgive is Hokusai's apparent neglect of his youngest daughter O-Nao, who was born blind and lives with their mother in another part of the city. It is the bond between O-Ei and her younger sibling that gives *Miss Hokusai* some of its most memorable moments, especially a sequence when the two sisters go walking through the snow and a young

boy playfully lures O-Nao into a snowball fight. It's a beautiful scene that would have been perfect if this were a live action film, but is made even more powerful by some extraordinary animation.

But this isn't really a biopic – so little is known about O-Ei's actual life that the filmmakers have taken the barebones of history and woven a fantastic story around them: while *Miss Hokusai* is a film about many things – love and art especially – it also, very occasionally, takes a nod towards the supernatural. After O-Ei accidentally ruins

her father's dragon painting, and he refuses to begin another, she shooes him outside and paints the dragon herself, while a 'real' dragon whips sinuously through the clouds above their house... and then there is the possessed courtesan, whose face takes on a life of its own while she lies sleeping... and a demonic painting that terrorises its owner until Hokusai arrives to put everything right with just a subtle brushstroke.

The animation isn't as flashy as a Studio Ghibli production but nor does it need to be. Director Keiichi Hara and his team haven't wasted time filling in every detail, which means the details they do focus upon are even more impressive – the breeze fluttering a banner, the beautifully observed way O-Ei yawns in her sleep, her mouth trembling, the manner in which O-Ei tucks a flower into the sleeve of O-Nao's kimono for safekeeping. Miho Maruo's screenplay is equally as subtle, with a psychological depth we don't usually find in even the best animation, and includes some lovely flashes of humour – the scene when the young artist Hatsugoro clumsily attempts to declare his love to O-Ei and ends up buying a potted plant instead is wonderful.

*Miss Hokusai* proves that animation, a genre normally reserved for children and fantasy worlds, is an art form that's not only capable of telling grown-up stories but – when the right subject presents itself – can tell that story better than any other category of cinema. *Miss Hokusai* is a masterpiece and this will be, without a doubt, one of the standout releases of the year.

IAN WHITE

★★★★★ 10





## TRINITY SEVEN

DUAL / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: HIROSHI NISHIKIORI / SCREENPLAY: HIROYUKI YOSHINO, KENJI SAITO, SHOGO YASUKAWA / STARRING: CAMERON BAUTSCH, ALLISON SUMRALL, CHRISTINA STROUP, CARLI MOSIER, CHELSEA MCCURDY, PATRICIA DURAN, KIRA VINCENT-DAVIS / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

After his home town is destroyed by a mysterious black sun and his beloved cousin lost to the void, teenage Arata joins a school for mages to learn enough magic to rescue her. He soon encounters the Trinity Seven, a group of powerful schoolgirl mages who aid his efforts while he variously lusts after them.

In the best tradition of harem series such as this, each one of the seven is defined as a basic female archetype, such as the tough girl, the shy girl, the aloof

girl and the nerdy girl, this last one also doubling up with a sexy evil twin. While this kind of set-up is largely the focus of the harem subgenre, it shouldn't preclude the girls having functioning personalities beyond their behaviour towards Arata or their primary presence being intended to provoke his desire.

As well as this, the series is riddled with an absurd volume of fan service, frequently focused on to such an extent it supersedes everything else going on,

including the occasional battle sequence. As well as the tight and revealing outfits the girls wear, for some reason dispelling magic causes their clothes to explode off, leaving only a few scraps strategically stuck to their shapely bodies. There is also inadvertent groping at least once an episode and a random beach scene a few episodes in where they slink about in skimpy bikinis. While it's nowhere near as explicit as, say, High School DxD, the constant lechery becomes rather grating.

It turns out Arata has an inherent ability to copy the magic of others, meaning that he can gain powerful abilities without having to bother understanding them or go through the inconvenience of having the slightest idea what he's doing. He calls to mind some dynastic scion at an elite school whose wealthy family bought his way in, uncaring of how much work it took for his poor but talented peers to attain the position he drifted into practically on a whim, and remains utterly oblivious of how much advantage his fortunate circumstances have afforded him through no effort, ability or even competence of his own.

We are apparently supposed

to admire Arata for his blunt honesty, while in reality all his cavalier nonchalance does is highlight how thoroughly obnoxious and unlikable he is. Possessing awareness that you are a misogynistic prick and freely admitting it doesn't actually excuse you for being one. It doesn't help that the only other male character in the entire series, the school's headmaster, is just as unapologetically perverted and so sees nothing wrong with his behaviour.

Setting aside the juvenile fantasies, other annoying issues include that the magic of the girls is meant to be emblematic of the seven deadly sins, but is not realised in any significant or competent way, while the magic system itself operates by utterly arbitrary and inconsistent rules that usually require laborious explanations to justify away single actions.

There are numerous anime series out there with similar content and themes to Trinity Seven that are actually entertaining. Watch any of them instead.

ANDREW MARSHALL



## WHEN MARNIE WAS THERE

DVD + BD / CERT: U / DIRECTOR: HIROMASA YONEBAYASHI / SCREENPLAY: KEIKO NIWA, MASASHI ANDO, HIROMASA YONEBAYASHI, DAVID FREEDMAN / STARRING: SARA TAKATSUKI, KASUMI ARIMURA, NANAKO MATSUSHIMA, SUSUMU TERAJIMA, TOSHI NEGISHI / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Is Studio Ghibli no more? You'd hope not with a reputation and following as substantial as it has, but the retirement of directors Hayao Miyazaki and Isai Takahata seems to have left it rudderless, exposing a crisis of confidence in how to move forward. So while we wait for what may or may not come next, we can at least savour one more exceptional full-length animation from the studio.

Just as with his previous

Ghibli feature *Arietty* (2010), director Hiromasa Yonebayashi's film is based on a British children's book, in this case Joan G. Robinson's title of the same name, beloved by schoolgirls since the 1960s. Bizarrely, the movie transposes the story setting from Norfolk to Japan, but if you weren't aware of the source material you really wouldn't know it.

Twelve-year-old Anna is a socially introverted, asthmatic

schoolgirl with autistic tendencies (if she doesn't get your drift, she'll call you a 'fat pig' and run away). Packed off to the country to get her adolescent act together via a spot of fresh air and landscape painting, Anna soon encounters a grandiose abandoned house across a nearby marsh lake. And wouldn't you know it, there's a ghostly girl who keeps appearing at the window, a girl who Anna will discover to be far more than just another imaginary friend.

When Miyazaki signed off with 2013's *The Wind Rises*, the world of cinema rose as one to salute his final masterpiece as though it were a work of greatness, as opposed to the meandering, self-indulgent downer it actually was.

What an unfitting farewell to Ghibli that would have been. Thankfully, *When Marnie Was There* hits all the right buttons; the story is a corker for a start (very reminiscent of Catherine Storr's classic *Marianne Dreams*) and Yonebayashi wastes no time drawing you into Anna's imaginary world. Wonderful hand-drawn animation (the pearly skies and lush landscapes are breathtaking), vibrant music and

spot-on vocal performances (whether you go for the English or original Japanese soundtrack) all combine to immerse you completely in her emotional journey.

It would be easy for this story to descend into g(h)ibberish. The last few minutes are packed with a level of dramatic revelation even EastEnders might baulk at attempting. The difference being that EastEnders would make a right cockney dog's dinner of it and this doesn't. It may not wring your emotions out like a dishrag and leave you whimpering for the emotional rollercoaster to stop (that would be *Takahata's Grave of the Fireflies*), but you'll definitely be holding back a wall of tears by the time the credits roll. Oh sod it, just have a big old cry.

The greatest irony of *When Marnie Was There* being 'the end' is that, although it's the first Ghibli movie to involve neither of the two creative lynchpins, it misses them not one jot. So hold your horses, men and women of Studio Ghibli, the fat lady ain't sung yet.

MICHAEL COLDWELL





## 11 EYES

DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: MASAMI SHIMODA / SCREENPLAY: KENICHI KANEMAKI, MAYORI SEKIJIMA, MIE KAGA / STARRING: DAISUKE ONO, MAI GOTO, YUU ASAKAWA, OMA ICHIMURA, SHOWTARO MORIKUBO / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Kakeru is a high school student who, along with five other teenagers, is suddenly pulled into the Red Night, a plane shifted world tinted with crimson where crystal towers stretch up to the sky and an imprisoned young woman is guarded by hideous monstrosities known as the Black Knights.

That's the set-up, and for most of the 12-episode series that's pretty much all you

get. The story, such as it is, meanders aimlessly between fight scenes and lengthy character exchanges that go nowhere, each interspersed with weak sapphic interplay, jiggling boobs and gratuitous upskirt underwear shots so frequent that they would actually get tedious even if you're into that kind of thing.

It's as though someone came up with a basic premise of dual dimensions and a

sextet of Chosen Ones being periodically pulled into a crimson Silent Hill, but then didn't bother to develop it into an actual story. It would have helped to have at least spent some more time developing the characters rather than their esoteric abilities, but what brief back stories we get do little in the way of expanding or even explaining their personalities.

While the regular fight scenes with the Black Knights and their inexhaustible army of expendable mooks offer some degree of peril for the characters, none of them are interesting enough to make you actually care whether they live or die, while the rules by which everyone's abilities operate are so inconsistent that it becomes difficult to become invested in anything that's going on.

The plot ambles along with little in the way of genuine development until late on when everything becomes unsatisfactorily resolved in a cluster bomb of expository nonsense and arbitrary bullshit, including the actual reason why these characters specifically were pulled together into this ethereal nightmare, something the story didn't previously even hint at. It's made even

worse by those imparting the knowledge having been aware of the true extent of the situation from the very beginning, but not having bothered to tell anyone.

The late-on central revelation actually had the potential to allow for some introspection into the nature of good and evil or free will and destiny, and offer some meaningful insight into precisely what it is that makes us human, but the cack-handed manner in which it is executed leaves it as just another example of nothing happening throughout the series that forms even the slightest bit of coherence.

ANDREW MARSHALL

★★★★★ 3



## FATE/STAY NIGHT: UNLIMITED BLADE WORKS - PART 2

DVD + BD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: TAKAHIRO MIURA / SCREENPLAY: VARIOUS / STARRING: AYAKO KAWASUMI, KANA UEDA, JUNICHI SUWABE, NORIAKI SUGIYAMA, JUNKO NODO / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

On paper, Fate/Stay Night: Unlimited Blade Works is rather bog-standard anime fare. There's a Biblical-themed war set to engulf the world into death and chaos, and it's up to some plucky high school kids, each paired with their warrior sidekicks, to either save our planet or claim it as theirs to conquer. There's action, romance, drama,

comedy, spectacular animation and even more spectacular exposition. All in all, a normal day at the office...

Just what is it, then that makes Unlimited Blade Works' second half a richly absorbing and downright thrilling watch? Is it the finely tuned character development found in Holy Grail War Masters Tosaka and Shiro? Is it in the multi-layered

plotting, with its sharp, precise weaving in and out of events and motivations? Is it the spellbinding animation?

Whatever it may be, it is, of course, impossible to understand, let alone enjoy, Part 2 without having seen Part 1, which we can now confidently say is left in the dust. It isn't bad per se, just... dull. A whole lotta exposition and what has the distinct smell of manufactured tension kept a potential riot of an anime lower than boiling temperature.

Fortunately for us, Part 2 blows the lid off of Part 1's pan as we surge way beyond boiling temperature. Tosaka and Shiro may be the lead characters here, but they aren't the stars anymore. We see the breadth of the Holy Grail War in full effect, not just in a literal sense, but a personal one too. Each of the Holy Grail Masters are given full dramatic aplomb, as their own stories slip into the narrative. Some are heart-breaking, some are pure evil, but all of them throw endless curveballs into the story, crafting an unbeatable level of depth that makes Unlimited Blade Works all the

more absorbing.

The Servants, however, come off a little shorter, and live up to their names in more ways than one. Whilst there are some tantalising attempts at making these warriors three-dimensional, their development is trapped by the very story they serve. All except for Archer, the sole Servant who receives the most captivating of stories. He spent much of Part 1 as the buff, uncomplicated thug who hints but rarely delivers. Here, however, Archer is blown wide open...

Perhaps what really makes Part 2 of Unlimited Blade Works tick all the boxes is how it balances everything into a cohesive package. A very all-encompassing tale of death, destruction and war is given a very intimate perspective. The clashing ideologies of how Shiro and Archer is the stuff that Batman v Superman can only dream of. This isn't an anime to be devoured, it's an anime to be savoured.

FRED McNAMARA

★★★★★ 9

# COSPLAY CATWALK

A MONTHLY FOCUS ON THE COSTUMED ROLE-PLAY SCENE AT FAN CONVENTIONS AROUND THE WORLD

## READER'S COSPLAY “TATTOOED WOLVERINE”



This month, we catch up with Steve, a popular cosplayer whose Wolverine costume turns heads everywhere...

**STARBURST:** How did you start cosplaying?  
Wolver-Steve: I started being Wolverine as a teenager at home and at fancy dress events way before cosplay was a 'big thing' here. I just carried it on, as comic cons have become more extreme. I love the buzz and pure escapism of it. It's truly a great thing to do and the kids that come up to me in awe make it all worthwhile. I'm now even part of a fundraising team for charity named The Super Heroes Cosplay (appropriately) but true to form and character Wolverine-wise... "I go where I wanna go."

I'm 27 years a fan of the character

with a huge collection of memorabilia and an amazing little son named Logan (of course). I go by the moniker of the 'Tattooed Wolverine', kinda has a nice ring to it. My Twitter following is strong and grows by the day.

**How long do you spend making the costumes and how much do you usually budget for?**

My current Wolverine suit cost £2100 and took eight months to design, craft and create, with many thanks to Victoria Potterton.

**Do you have any future cosplaying plans?**  
My future cosplays will always be Wolverine!

MARTIN UNSWORTH

You can find out more about Steve at [facebook.com/WolverSteve9](https://facebook.com/WolverSteve9), follow on Twitter: @Wolversteve, Instagram: @Wolversteve9 and find him with the hashtag: #TattooedWolverine.



NEWS AND PREVIEWS  
IN GAMING  
BY LEE PRICE

# PIXEL JUICE



## NX Revealed... Kind Of

So Nintendo has finally shone the spotlight on the NX. Now named the Switch – thus continuing the company's recent tradition of picking pretty ridiculous names for its consoles – the reveal showed that the console is indeed what it was rumoured to be. That's right, Nintendo is releasing a console that can be played at home or on the move, all in one.

And that's pretty much all we know, outside of it having a high-definition screen.

So what do we think of it? Well firstly, we have to wonder how much of a punch the console can actually pack considering its inner workings are all contained in something that is no bigger than a standard tablet computer. We can see that it runs *Skyrim* if the trailer is any indication, but is it an updated version or a straight port of the version that we saw on the PS3 and Xbox 360?

Plus, we aren't sure that the modular controls are really our thing, particularly the smaller versions that look like they will be easily crushed by anybody who isn't five years old.

Still, it's Nintendo doing what it does best these days, in that it's a product that is completely different to what other console manufacturers are offering. Different doesn't always mean better, though, and we aren't really sure how many people are looking to buy an inconveniently large handheld that is also likely to have less power than existing home consoles.

Oh, and Nintendo has told us we're waiting until January 12th for more information because an underwhelming trailer featuring hand models pretending to play old games should be enough for now. We definitely see how not saying pretty much anything about the tech specs of the console is going to get people excited.

## COMING SOON



### RESIDENT EVIL VII: BIOHAZARD

PLATFORM: PS4, XBOX ONE, PC  
RELEASE DATE: JANUARY 24TH

*The wait is almost over. After terrifying gamers with a demo that was reminiscent of the brilliant P.T., Capcom's latest entry into the Resident Evil series will arrive in January. While we still don't know a whole lot about the game or the family that it's based around, the mere fact that it represents Capcom trying something different with the series is more than enough to get many a gamer jaded by the action-heavy slant of the previous games excited again. This is the biggest release in January bar none and will hopefully be a must-have.*

## COMING SOON



### GRAVITY RUSH 2

PLATFORM: PS4  
RELEASE DATE: JANUARY 20TH

*The original Gravity Rush introduced a number of mechanics based on the titular force, leading to it gaining a fair bit of popularity amongst quite a few gamers. The second game in the series follows directly on from the first and focuses on developing some of these interesting mechanics further by allowing the player to select from three distinct styles, all of which have their own advantages. This should lend an extra layer of strategy to an already complex game, meaning it will be a must for fans of the original.*

## GAME Charge for VR Demo

We all know GAME, right? It's the largest videogame retailer in the UK and is surprisingly still in business despite having once gone into administration and being the company that purchased Gamestation before taking away everything that made those stores unique then wondering why people weren't going there anymore.

Anybody who has been in one of their stores will likely have played on one of the demo stations that they have set up to showcase the latest games. They are free to play and have likely led to a number of purchases being made.

So, of course, GAME now wants to change that up. Instead of letting people sample PlayStation VR for free, the company wants to charge players as much as £1.5 per demo. If you make the decision to buy based on your demo, you get your money back. If you don't, we guess it's a swift boot in the arse and a waste of money.

We're guessing they don't have high hopes for PlayStation VR and want to find some way to make money off it. Needless to say, the campaign has caused a lot of outrage but, for the moment at least, GAME is sticking to its guns.



## SONIC is Coming to the Cinema

Well, this is news we didn't expect to be reporting. **Sonic the Hedgehog** is finally to make his way to the silver screen and, interestingly, his first proper movie is going to be helmed by Tim Miller. You may remember him as the director who was considered less valuable than Ryan Reynolds and thus booted from the **Deadpool** sequel.

Not a lot is known about the project at the time of writing, though it seems like it is going to be a family film (naturally) that will combine live action with CGI. Fingers crossed it helps to continue the little career resurgence that Sonic has been enjoying in recent years.

## COMING SOON



### CONSTRUCTOR HD

**PLATFORM:** MULTI

**RELEASE DATE:** JANUARY 31ST

*Constructor* was originally released way back in 1997 and gained a decent fan base despite the obvious similarities to the *Sim City* series. The game saw players take control of a construction company with the aim of driving their competition out of business, while occasionally building things in the process. In truth, it was more reminiscent of Bullfrog's Theme games than anything Sim-related. The HD update will pretty much do what it says on the tin and is certainly worth a look for those who enjoy their strategy games laced with a little humour.

## COMING SOON



### TALES OF BERSERIA

**PLATFORM:** PC, PS4

**RELEASE DATE:** JANUARY 27TH

*While the Final Fantasy series has done everything it can in recent memory to move away from the gameplay that made it so popular in the first place, Namco's Tales series has never strayed too far from its formula. This is by no means a bad thing, though, as the series continues to produce compelling games that satisfy the many traditional JRPG fans out there. Look for Tales of Berseria to do the same, though the introduction of the Soul Gauge in battles may require a bit of adjusting.*

## Phil Spencer Reveals Theory on Why Xbox One Doesn't Sell in Japan

Microsoft head Phil Spencer addressed the company's failings in Japan recently, highlighting the fact that the Xbox One really struggles to cater to the market's tastes, resulting in the console's spectacular failure in the region.

"A lot of Japanese gamers really seem to like games such as *Persona 5* or *Nioh*," he said in a recent interview "if we plan on doing better in the Japanese game market we want to release games that the average Japanese gamer will really enjoy."

He added: "We plan to talk with many other developers in order to bring more games to the Japanese market, we were happy to announce *Final Fantasy XV* on the Xbox One which made me extremely happy and as mentioned we plan on a lot more connections!"

Unfortunately, we don't see a lot of Japanese gamers rushing out to buy the console for *Final Fantasy XV* given that those who would be interested in the game will almost undoubtedly own PS4s. Still, it will be interesting to see how hard Microsoft push - and for how much longer - to finally break the Japanese market.

## CANDY CRUSH to Become a Gameshow

American television station CBS has announced its plans to turn popular **CandySwipe** rip-off **Candy Crush** – guess which one has made millions – into a TV show.

CBS Entertainment President Glenn Geller tried to hype up this train wreck of an idea, claiming: "We're excited to work with Lionsgate and King to adapt one of the world's most popular and entertaining game franchises for television and make it available to its massive, passionate fan base who can watch and play along at home."

Entertaining? Really? Haha, nope! Pray to your chosen deity that this does not become a success.

## BATMAN: ARKHAM VR Only Has an Hour Of Content

The argument that VR is likely to be a fad is not being helped by some recent news to come from Rocksteady about how their upcoming **Batman: Arkham VR** will only contain about 60 minutes of actual content.

Given the depth that other titles in the series have, this really can't be seen as anything but a disappointment. Does anybody really want to spend ridiculous money on a PlayStation VR and a game for the sake of an hour of play?

## MASS EFFECT: ANDROMEDA Release Date Revealed?

Nothing official has come out of the mouths of any EA spokespeople just yet, but it appears a recent Amazon listing may have revealed the release date for **Mass Effect: Andromeda**.

Dark Horse Comics' **Art of Mass Effect: Andromeda** book has been listed on the site with a release date of March 23rd in the UK. While this is obviously not the game, it seems very unlikely that a book featuring the art of the game would be released without the actual game itself being available to the public.

For what it's worth, that possible release date also matches up to EA's statement that the game will be released during the fourth fiscal quarter.

**COMING SOON**



## **YAKUZA 0**

**PLATFORM: PS4**

**RELEASE DATE: JANUARY 24TH**

Sega's prequel to the popular *Yakuza* series will give players a more in-depth look into how the colourful cast of the game came into being. Expect plenty of hard hitting combat and a lot of risqué Japanese humour that makes us stuffy Brits a little uncomfortable. Available through PSN, the game is sure to get snapped up by the fans, but should also make a great starting point for those who have yet to discover *Yakuza* in all of its violently melodramatic glory.



## **RED DEAD REDEMPTION 2 Announced**

We figured we'd follow up that turgid *Candy Crush* piece with some awesome news.

After a little teasing, Rockstar has officially announced that *Red Dead Redemption 2* is coming, somehow managing to generate as much excitement as Nintendo managed for an entire console in the process.

For those who didn't play *Red Dead Redemption*, first of all, get it played. Secondly, the game is basically an open-world cowboy saga that is truly brilliant in execution.

Rockstar was typically brief with the announcement, stating: "With *Red Dead Redemption 2*, the team is working hard to push forward our vision for interactive entertainment in a truly living world. We hope to deliver players an epic experience that builds upon everything we've learned making games."

Knowing Rockstar, it's exactly what they will deliver. We are more than a little bit excited for this one.

## **COMING SOON**



## **SABAN'S MIGHTY MORPHIN' POWER RANGERS: MEGA BATTLE**

**PLATFORM: PS4, XBOX ONE**

**RELEASE DATE: JANUARY 2017**

Fans of classic Power Rangers rejoice, as *Mega Battle* is here to delight those who have happy memories of the old series. This stylised multiplayer beat-'em-up promises to offer a number of levels based on some of the classic episodes from the series, all pulled from the first two seasons. Expect a surprisingly deep combat system, if the game's hype machine is to be believed. This is definitely one for the fans but it may prove to be a pretty decent fighter in its own right.

## **RESIDENT EVIL VII VR to be a Timed Exclusive**

A recent advert that was spotted by a Reddit user seems to confirm that Capcom's upcoming *Resident Evil VII VR* will actually be a timed exclusive for the console.

The game will be exclusive to Sony for one year following release, after which we assume Capcom will port it to other devices. That year should also give the company a better idea of just how well the whole VR idea takes off, making the decision to port easier too.

## **Hello Games' Misery Continues as Twitter Gets Hacked**

Things don't seem to be getting a whole lot better for *No Man's Sky* developer Hello Games. In addition to being under investigation by the Advertising Standards Authority and having to deal with the slew of gamers who are unhappy with what their magnum opus turned out to be, the company now appears to have a hacker in their midst.

Well, it's not quite that serious. Basically, somebody managed to get into the company's Twitter account to create a post about how *No Man's Sky* was a mistake. Hello Games got control back and all is well again. You know, except for the stream of hatred poured their way over their game, of course.

# REVIEWS

THE LATEST  
GAMING RELEASES  
REVIEWED AND RATED



## TITANFALL 2

DEVELOPER: RESPAWN ENTERTAINMENT / PUBLISHER: ELECTRONIC ARTS / PLATFORMS: PC, XBOX ONE, PS4 / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Titanfall is one of those classic examples of a game which sort of made it. You know the ones. The kind driven by hype culture, pushed forwards by advertising, and proved to be genuinely good in the end, but lacked the kind of staying power to become a true classic.

By comparison, Respawn seems to have seriously sat down and examined their previous creation to produce Titanfall 2. It's the same kind of beast as the previous game, but there's a determined effort to flesh out the qualities that were found lacking in the previous title. The most obvious of these is a vastly better single player campaign, which offers greater insight into the world as a whole, and the gigantic mechs in this war. Having been forced to take control of one thanks to the death of its pilot, the inexperienced Cooper finds himself joined with BT, an emotionally blind titan who is obtuse to his sarcasm and quips.

Oddly, while certainly burying itself in clichés and suffering from some staggeringly poor dialogue at times, the campaign proves to be surprisingly engaging. Predictable as it might be, the characters themselves prove to be well rounded, likeable and with a definitive character arc and it offers vastly better insight into this universe than prior lore. Plus you have the added fun of scenery-chewing villains worthy of an '80s action movie.

Another key component that is definitely improved are the map designs and progression options. While the core

gameplay itself remains unchanged from its predecessor, maps now range from alien cities to destroyed metropolises, with a multitude of game modes, which make far better use of the titans. Bounty Hunt remains one stand-out example, which turns into a 'smash and grab' affair where you hoard money taken from downed foes. It's enough to get you hooked again, and with far more functional and cosmetic character customisation options, there is much more of a sense that you're working towards something.

This is ultimately the same game as before with a few choice alterations, but that was really what Titanfall needed,

building upon the strong backbone of its predecessor to offer a greater experience. With multiplayer providing the kind of chaotic and manic fun of past Halo games, and the campaign proving to be a fun, adventurous outing, even if it does stick to tried-and-true storytelling ideas more often than it should. If you're looking for something wholly new or revolutionary, you're not going to find it here. If you're after a ludicrously fun FPS, you'll find few better options this year.

CALLUM SHEPARD





## BATTLEFIELD 1

DEVELOPER: EA DICE / PUBLISHER: ELECTRONIC ARTS / PLATFORMS: PC, XBOX ONE, PS4 / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

This game is a joke. A bad one at that, and the only problem is that the developers were completely unaware of it.

World War I is a setting which has been rarely explored in video games. Save for the odd exception, developers seem to favour players gunning down Nazi stormtroopers over the Kaiser's forces, which is a great shame. This was, after all, an era of great change, developing tactics and the first steps into an era of mechanised warfare. The problem is that the developer has squandered this, ignoring not only how the war itself developed but even the hostile, horrific nature of trench warfare. While no one was expecting Verdun, especially given the Battlefield series' broader appeal, most were hoping for at least a determined stab at authenticity in a few places. Let's just say that DICE's creation falls short of what we were expecting.

Let's start with the campaign, which sees you playing as a bunch of super soldiers who would put John Matrix to shame. For all the times the cutscenes try to impress upon the player some sense of PTSD or regret, the second you get into the gameplay you're capable of mowing down troops by the hundreds. Not only that but historical accuracy quickly goes out the window, with DICE mashing together any experimental or odd weapon they can and distributing it throughout an entire army.

In one particular case, a German mission sees you sprinting uphill, kitted out like Iron Man and firing a heavy machinegun from the hip, mowing down hundreds of troops with ease. Then, just to top this, you promptly jump onto a flak gun, blow up a full wing of enemy bombers on your lonesome and walk away unscathed from a collision with a crashing aircraft. If the game promptly cut to Ultramarines deep-

striking onto the trenches, or William 'B.J.' Blazkowicz fighting Mecha Hitler, the only reaction it would get is "Ah, now this all makes sense!"

Even once you drop the campaign and delve into the multiplayer aspects, things don't get much better. Everyone and anyone in the game is armed with experimental semi-automatic weapons they can wield with ease, and explosions are rife throughout the game. There is no effort put into class co-ordination or even trench fighting, merely an all-out rush-brawl by both sides. Vehicles are so dominant that there are often only one or two major tanks per side, and visibility is such an issue that snipers rule supreme over any map. While it is still competently made, and there is a solid backbone for a fun game here, it's jarring how little is actually done to reflect the ways of war from this era.

Even the more rustic nature of the technology is all but ignored, as guns are near recoilless and there's barely a bolt action rifle to be found. Worse still though, the few times it does get into the World War I spirit of things, it actually hurts the game. While DICE were fine widely distributing so many experimental guns that it breaks any semblance of immersion, there are no options for real weapons customisation. The more engaging or entertaining stuff found in the likes of Battlefield 4 is nowhere to be seen, and you will be hard pressed to find anything of value beyond the occasional scope.

Now, this said, the game does have a few genuinely great moments that save it despite all of this. For starters, the engine itself is top notch, and graphically the game is absolutely beautiful to behold. The attention to detail across the various maps is astounding, and how they shift

over the course of a battle is one of the highlights of the entire experience. While it's certainly nothing like early 20th century combat, many of the room by room firefights are definitely entertaining as well. The problem is, however, that they're no more so than prior Battlefield games with few improvements. At its core, this is merely a modern military shooter with a 1918 coat of paint. All it unfortunately keeps coming down to is pointing at the last game in the series and saying "yeah, it's like that but worse."

If you are merely after an entertaining FPS experience and lack any real investment in this era, you might want to give this one a look. Switch off your brain and shoot a few hundred Ottoman Empire forces by all means, but if you were awaiting a faithful World War I combat experience, give this one a miss.

CALLUM SHEPARD

★★★★★ 6





## CIVILIZATION VI

DEVELOPER: FIRAXIS GAMES / PUBLISHER: 2K GAMES / PLATFORM: PC, LINUX, MAC / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Perhaps the most famous of the 4X strategy genre is Civilization, a series that has rendered players glued to their screens since 1991. It's one of the longest lasting franchises in gaming history, and also one of the most consistently heralded. So there was a lot of excitement when publishers 2K Games announced a new addition to the franchise. But can Civilization VI place itself on the same lofty pedestal as its predecessors?

The first thing that many people noticed was the new graphics style. Taking quite the detour from the more realistic look of Civilization V, the sixth game goes for a more colourful, stylised approach. It's a decision that has split fans down the centre, but we personally love it. Aside from the brighter colours being actually quite easy on the eyes, it also allows for the features of the world to stand out more. Much like Windwaker in the Legend of Zelda series, the more stylised approach may be controversial now, but it is also more likely to look attractive ten years down the line.

The main new feature in the game is 'unstacking cities'. Rather than building everything on one tile, there is a new district system that widens your empire a little more. There are bonuses for placing certain things in certain places, so one really has to stop to make some tough decisions. Such a new concept was a risky move, but we think they've pulled it off really well.

Let's get down to the real meat and gravy of any Civilization game, though, which is, of course, the civilizations you can control. From Trajan of Rome to Cleopatra of Egypt, there are 20 distinct and unique 'Civs' on offer, each with their own benefits and bonuses that suit

different playstyles. One can understand the reluctance to leave Civ V, which has 43 to choose from (with all the expansions), but we think it's a good move to make, with each one providing a fresh experience from the others.

We cannot sing enough praise to the music in Civilization VI, which is just phenomenal. Pieces evolve over the course of the game as your empire advances technologically, and each Civ has a theme associated with it. The theme associated with good old England, for example, is 'Scarborough Fair' and you'll find that the piece changes over time from a single lone instrument to a swelling modern orchestra.

One noteworthy thing is that most of the features present in Civ V and its expansions are present in the sequel, with only a small number of missing features that will no doubt be added over time. This is an extremely respectful gesture. The folks behind The Sims 4 could really learn something from this.

Despite all the shining innovations, though, we can't ignore the flaws, of which this game has a few. For instance, the AI seems to have a few irritating quirks. During one game, the reviewer was invited into a joint war by Victoria of England, however when he accepted, she instantly denounced him for being a warmonger. The game also boasts the ability to temporarily control the troops of any city-state you are allied with, for a fee, of course, but you'll often find them still using crossbows during the Atomic Era. Which doesn't exactly make you want to delve into the treasury!

There is one important question to ask of Civilization VI: is it good enough to move on from the previous game? For

us, it's a resounding yes. Compared to the already impressive fifth game, Civilization VI breathes new life into the franchise, no, the entire genre. The world you are placed in is simple to look at but also oozes attention to detail, the music is incredible and there is a wide variety of empires to choose from. Hopefully, future expansions will add the currently absent features, of which there are a few, and maybe, over time, the AI will be improved. Whatever happens, we can conclude that Civilization VI will stand the test of time.

And if that didn't sell it to you, it has Sean Bean in it.

TOM ACTON

★★★★★ 9



## MOVIES & TV



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# RETRO BYTES

A LOOK BACK AT  
THE WORLD OF  
RETRO GAMING  
BY GUEST COLUMNIST  
SEAN ONLY



## FIGHTING TALK

The arcade cabinet of *STREET FIGHTER II: THE WORLD WARRIOR* was released to an unsuspecting public in 1991. It caused such a stir and was so wildly popular that 2D fighting games almost overnight became one of the most prevalent categories in video games. Despite the relative simplicity of the genre compared to many modern games, they are just as popular and sought after today. With the recent releases of *STREET FIGHTER 5* and *KING OF FIGHTERS 14* and current gen entries in the *KILLER INSTINCT*, *MORTAL KOMBAT*, and *BLAZBLUE* franchises all coming out in the last year or so, it seems demand for side-scrolling tournament fighters might actually be higher than ever. With that in mind, we're going to take a little stroll down hadouken memory lane and take a look back at some of the greatest and most memorable fighting games of all time...

### GUILTY GEAR

Exclusively released to Sony's PlayStation console in 1998, Arc System Works' inaugural *Guilty Gear* game really stood out from the crowd with its beautiful, sharp hand-drawn graphics, stylish animation and incredible soundtrack. It came out at a time when pretty much the only real fighting games being released outside of Japan were 3D *Tekken* and *Virtua Fighter* games/clones or home ports of Capcom arcade games. *Guilty Gear* was offering something very different. Not just in terms of gameplay, but stylistically, too. Daisuke Ishiwatari and his development team's designs were heavily influenced by Manga and Japanese Anime. The idea was that they would create an incredibly technical and polished game that would appeal not

only to fighting game purists, but also to fans of Japanese animation. This helped give the game an almost immediate cult-like status upon release.

Although Ishiwatari was a huge fan of the *Street Fighter* series and initially wanted to make a game in that mould, *Guilty Gear* is far more reminiscent of the more technical style often employed by SNK in franchises such as *King of Fighters* and *Samurai Shodown*. In fact, the mixture of varying strength punches and kicks along with weapon attacks mean that *Guilty Gear* could loosely be described as playing like a more frenetic combination of those two games. In addition to standard features such as the super meter (known here as a tension gauge), which you are required to fill to perform super moves (known here as chaos attacks), *Guilty Gear*

also introduced instant kill techniques, which would instantly drain all the opposing player's life bar if landed. Nasty.

All in all, *Guilty Gear* definitely falls into the 'must play' category (as the vast majority of reviews from its release are testament to) and is fairly easy and inexpensive to track down today. Go get yourself some good ol' Manga-inspired violence!

### ETERNAL CHAMPIONS

Developed and published by Sega in 1993, *Eternal Champions* was one of the first home console fighting games that wasn't an arcade port. It was programmed from the ground up exclusively for the MegaDrive/Genesis with the intention of creating a new series exclusive to Sega that would tempt people away from their arch rivals, Nintendo. The immense popularity of both *Street Fighter* and *Mortal Kombat* meant people were desperate for the next character-driven combat game and with the 16-bit console wars at their peak, a successful, exclusive fighting franchise could have really helped turn the tide in Sega's favour.

*Eternal Champions* needed something to distinguish it from the crowd and one of the game's main selling points was the somewhat complicated plot, which involved a god-like being gathering the souls of some of history's greatest fighters for a tournament to determine who gets to go back to their time and change their fate. Whether or not this was inspired by Bill and Ted we can't be sure, but what we do know is that you get to choose from an interesting array of characters from the present day, the distant past, and the distant future. Truth be told, it's only really a gimmick as they all just look like characters from a superhero comic book; but in this case, that's no bad thing! The art style is striking and the colours and animation are superb for the era. What *Eternal Champions* lacks in refinement and tight controls, it makes up for in charm. Kind of.

While *Eternal Champions* was fairly well received and did enjoy a level of popularity, it wasn't quite the roaring success Sega was hoping it would be. They attempted to keep the series alive with a sequel on the Mega CD and two spin-offs on the Game Gear and Mega Drive/Genesis (there was also a rumoured Saturn sequel that was scrapped), but Sega abandoned

the *Eternal Champions* universe soon afterwards. The original game hasn't exactly stood the test of time incredibly well, but it is an interesting and (mostly) enjoyable take on the genre nonetheless. Not too many people seem to be aware of *Eternal Champions* nowadays, but it surely deserves to be in any fighting game enthusiast's collection. It may not have the playability of some of its Capcom and SNK cousins, but there really are no other games in this genre quite like *Eternal Champions*.

## X-MEN: CHILDREN OF THE ATOM

Originally released on Capcom's CP System II arcade hardware in 1994, *COTA* was extremely significant in the history of fighting games in that it was the first time Marvel Comics and Capcom had joined forces. The Marvel/Capcom crossover series is one of the most popular and highly revered in the genre. Several of the later games have legendary status in the community and are often played at the world's biggest fighting game tournaments. *COTA* was not only the game that kicked off this franchise, but also the blueprint for all subsequent entries in the series. The premise for the game is really very simple – take popular Marvel (or in this case, X-Men) characters and put them in a *Street Fighter* style one-on-one fighting game. It's a simple premise, but sometimes a simple premise is the best kind of premise. To add authenticity and a bit of fan service, voice actors from the mid-'90s X-Men animated series reprised their roles and the in-game character models were based on artwork from the show. Add in some first class animation and some seizure-inducing super moves and you're left with a game that gives you the uncanny feeling that you're really in control of your X-Person of choice. Up to this point in time, *COTA* was absolutely the best translation of comic book superheroes into a game.

In addition to all the regular tropes and features one would expect from a fighting game of this era, *COTA* also innovated



several gameplay mechanics such as super jumps, backwards and forwards rolls, air combos, multi directional projectiles and (most notably) multi-tiered fighting environments. Many of these features have subsequently become the norm in fighting games, so it's fairly apparent just how influential *COTA* is. It's certainly safe to say that if you like Capcom and you like superheroes, you won't be disappointed with this one.

## GAROU: MARK OF THE WOLVES

You can't really have an article about 2D fighters without featuring at least one SNK game. Originally released on the Neo Geo MVS and AES systems in late 1999 and early 2000 respectively, *MOTW* is the final entry (to date, at least) in SNK's massively influential *Fatal Fury* franchise. It's difficult to underestimate just how highly regarded this game is in the fighting game community. It's often cited as being experts' de facto greatest fighter of all

time. While that's obviously up for debate, what isn't in question is how flawlessly this game plays, how ridiculously tight the controls are, how fantastic the soundtrack is, or how stunning the visuals are. On the subject of the visuals, it's staggering that this game was developed in 1999 for a system that was released in 1990. Seventeen years later, it still looks the absolute mutt's nuts and totally holds up by today's standards. SNK really knew what they were doing and managed to push the Neo Geo hardware almost to breaking point.

*MOTW* abandons the multiple lanes of battle used in previous entries in the franchise, instead favouring a far more intricate fighting system and single-tiered combat over the tactical element of plane switching. New gameplay features include the 'Tactical Offence Position' (referring to an area on your life gauge that, when reached, grants the player certain abilities) and the 'Just Defend' system. This is a timing-based blocking system (somewhat similar to the parry function in *Street Fighter III*) where a perfectly timed block input is rewarded with a small amount of health regeneration and a window of opportunity for a counterattack.

Up until recently, *MOTW* was fairly tricky to track down, with no PAL releases whatsoever and only relatively limited USA and Japanese releases. However, since its release on both XBL and the PSN that has all changed. Now nobody has an excuse not to have played this classic!

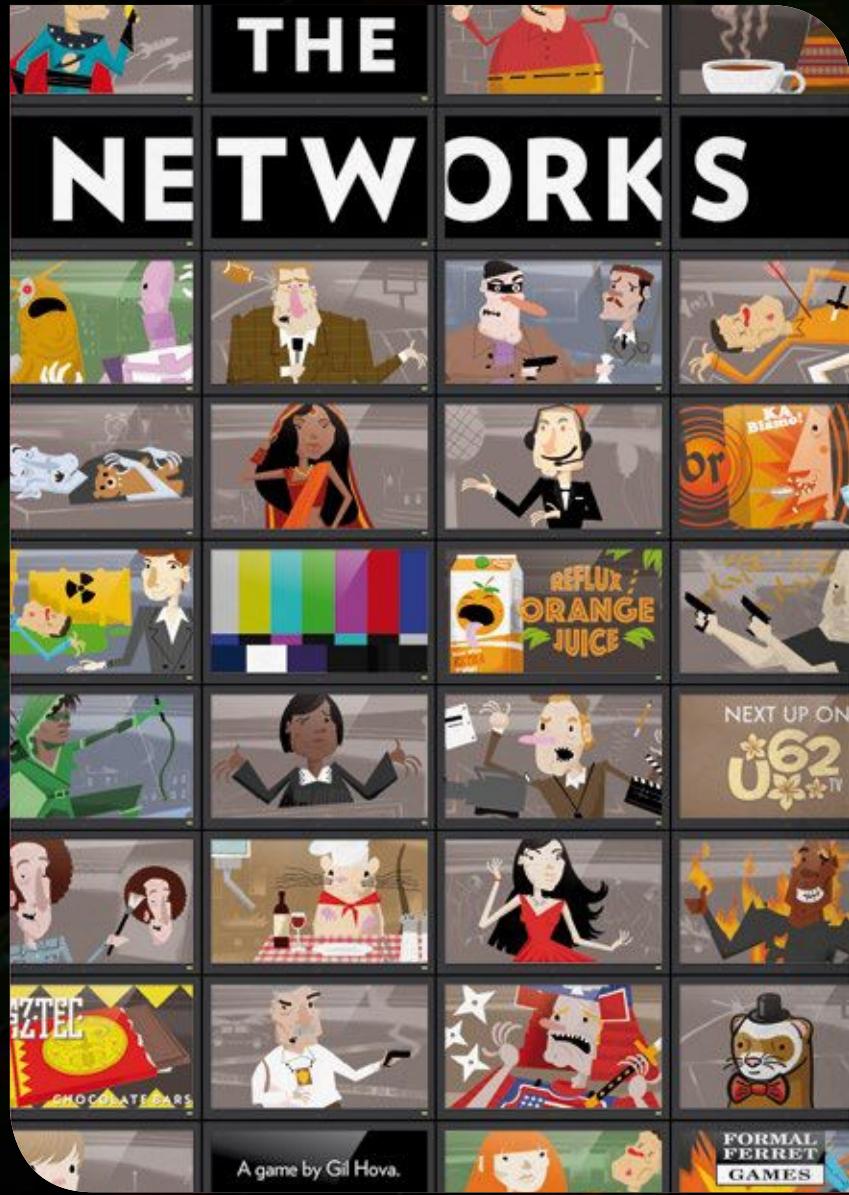
There's obviously an E-Honda-sized tonne of other fighting games we've not mentioned, but perhaps we'll get to some of those in a future issue. If you have even a passing interest in this genre, we highly recommend checking out some of the games we covered here today. In fact, why not check out all of them? But just remember – you must defeat Sheng Long to stand a chance.





# ROLL FOR DAMAGE

ED FORTUNE  
GUIDES YOU  
THROUGH THE  
REALM OF  
TABLETOP GAMING



**C**hances are that if you're a regular reader of *STARBURST*, you've probably fantasised about being in charge of putting shows onto television. Whereas some people want to be fantasy football managers or military commanders, some of us simply dream of being able to un-cancel shows like *Firefly* and perhaps ensure that Ricky Gervais never appears on the small screen ever again.

Given the crossover between genre

TV fans and gamers, it's unsurprising that there are a handful of games out there that let you live the dream. Well, sort of.

In Formal Ferret's top game, *The Networks*, you and your opponents are the people behind a big television network. Of course, you can't have a TV channel without content, and to make those you'll need Shows, Stars, and Ads. You start with three pretty crappy TV shows (with names such as 'Emergency Broadcast Hour'), a not very interesting advert and

a mediocre star; maybe last year's reality TV show runner-up?

The aim of the game is to gain viewers and money. Viewers give you points, and the person with the most points wins. Money can be converted into points, but it's not worth it. Best to spend the cash on other things that give you more viewers. Like better TV shows. Every round an array of shows, adverts and stars become available to the players and the players jostle into position to get the best deals. Turn order depends on your actions on the last round; the first person to stop trying to tinker with their network tends to get first pick of the goodies in the next round.

Your station can hold three shows at any one time. You can enhance them by putting them in the right time slot, and also by picking the right star for the show. For example, a retired football player may be perfect for your sportsball show, but he'd probably be pretty rubbish in a cooking show. They need funding, so if you can get the right sort of advert then you'll get a cash bonus.

The right sort of combination of star, show, and adverts will reap a lot of rewards. Some shows get better with age; each round they'll improve in terms of viewers. Others are unpredictable. Stars also draw viewers and each have their own feature. For example, there's an 'actor who always dies' card who gets loads of viewers in the first season, and nothing after that. The illustration looks suspiciously like Sean Bean.

You can also cancel shows and bung them into re-runs and archives. Re-runs reap their own rewards. Interestingly, one card is a genre show about a time-travelling English chap. He gets rubbish ratings, but in the archives he's worth loads as people binge watch the DVDs and repeats.

*The Networks* is a theme-heavy game. The cards are carefully worked out; for example there isn't a Nathan Fillion star card, or a Bruce Campbell star card. There is a 'Square Jawed Actor' card instead. This does the job quite well; you can imagine it represents the star you want it to be. The shows themselves tend to be parodies. For example, 'Found' is clearly a parody of *Lost*. It gets loads of viewers in the third round, but tapers off after that...

Game wise, it's pretty funny. You're consistently jostling with the other players, looking for the killer combination that will get the most viewers. The competitive aspect is just strong enough to make it fun and you can happily gazump your

opponents by grabbing the shows you think they'll need. There's also a lot of fun in creating something weird and wacky with the right combination of shows, stars, and adverts. The art is nice and silly, without being too much of a distraction.

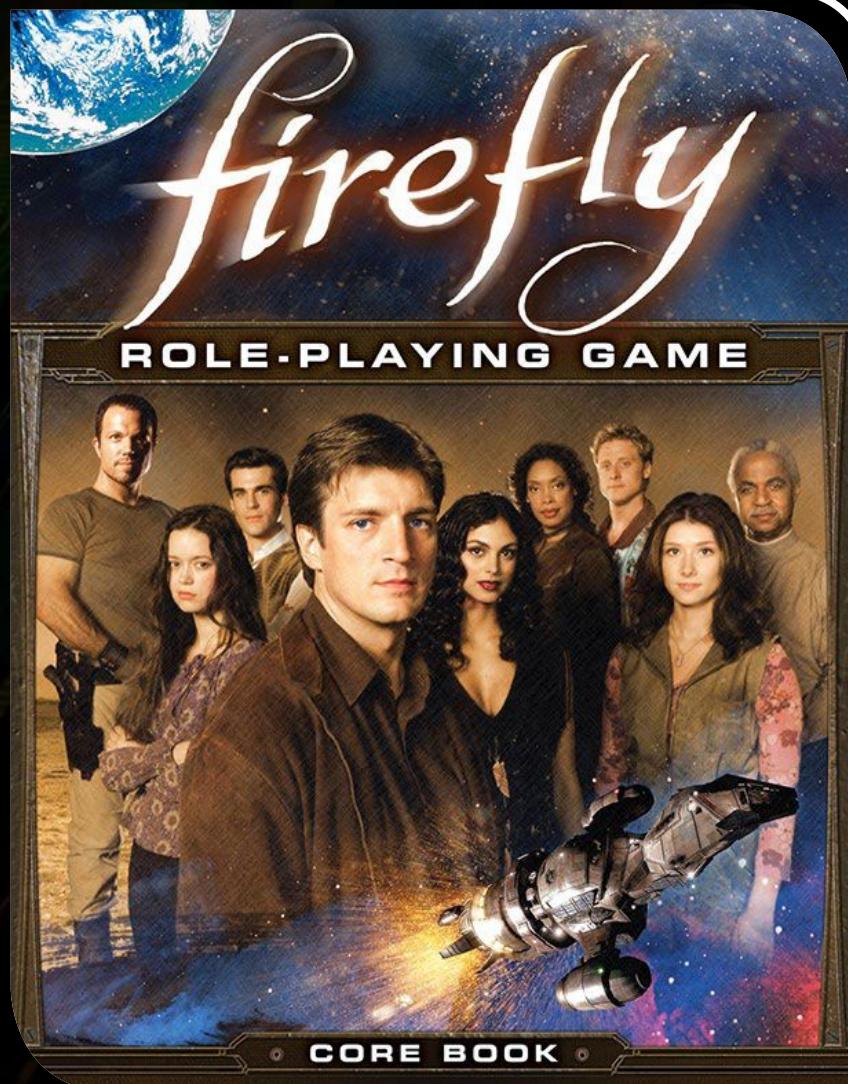
I'd compare it to something like *Powergrid*. It's a fun game that requires more than a little bit of thought, but it's not so complicated that you're constantly and consistently overthinking the game.

Speaking of TV show-related shenanigans, some of you may be surprised to learn that Margaret Weis Productions, the people behind the *Firefly* roleplaying game, has quit the industry. Given that they made games for shows and movies such as *Battlestar Galactica*, *Serenity*, *Smallville*, and *Supernatural*, this is a bit of a shame. Weis herself (better known for her D&D spin-off work) said that she will be concentrating on the writing from now on. The games will be picked up by games designer Cam Banks, who runs the Magic Vacuum games studio. It's looking like Banks intends to carry on adapting the original *Firefly* rules set. We understand that there will be an inevitable Kickstarter sometime soon.

On the subject of Kickstarter, your humble games columnist has recently gone a little bit crazy with all the games available on the crowdfunding website. Backing Kickstarter can often be a little bit of a risk, after all, so it's often tempting to go for the more experienced companies. Of the two that I recently backed, both were from excellent games companies.

First up was *Siege of the Citadel*, second edition. The original 1993 game was seen as *Heroquest* in space, and by many as the better take on *Space Crusade*. Though unconnected to the worlds of *Warhammer*, *Siege of the Citadel* had a similar vibe - space heroes battling monsters on a huge 3D board. The second edition Kickstarter saw games designer Richard Borg come back to refine the game and add tonnes of models to the set. As a lifelong fan of games like this, I'm very excited by it.

I'm slightly more excited by Mantic's



*Star Saga*. Mantic are masters of doing a good Kickstarter, and *Star Saga* is one of their best campaigns so far. The game is yet another dungeon crawl in space, but this time it's got alien rat monsters and freaky cyborgs. It's part of Mantic's

growing sci-fi setting *Warpath*. Given that I loved the fantasy version of this (called *Dungeon Saga*), I had to back it.

You can still pledge on both games, even though the crowdfunding campaigns have (successfully) ended, though you will have to hunt around on the Internet to find out more.

Finally, if you're looking for a Kickstarter to back, check out *The Forest Dragon* by Rory, which is currently picking up interest on Facebook and other social media. It's a card game about a dragon-based fantasy adventure, inspired by the imaginings of a nine-year-old boy. His dad happens to be one of the mad geniuses behind Cubicle 7 Entertainment, which means that the game has been tempered with the skill of an experienced games inventor. The art is especially notable - a mix of child-like drawing and modern art. Pretty crazy and exciting stuff.

Until next time, keep rolling those dice. +



Ed Fortune can tweet at @ed\_fortune and contacted via ed.fortune@starburstmagazine.com He's always interested to know what games you're playing. Unless it's Monopoly.

# WATTO'S EMPORIUM

STUFF WE LIKED FROM AROUND THE WEB THIS MONTH WITH JACK BOTTOMLEY

## ROGUE ONE Stuff

Between issues, the final trailer dropped for Gareth Edwards' **Rogue One: A Star Wars Story** (a film we are sure you are clued up on by now) and needless to say, **Star Wars** is indeed back and the Force looks to be with it. However, the nearer we get to the eagerly anticipated feature, the more merchandise that seems to be caught in the tractor beams of stores. And of all this gear we were happy to see the good ol' mug well represented at [grindstore.com](http://grindstore.com), who have a wide range of **Rogue One** mugs, from a dark Vader-themed design to an almost Splinter Cell-esque Death Trooper mug. Speaking of which, one of our favourite pieces of **Rogue One** merch thus far has to be the proper stylish Death Star light, available from [forbiddenplanet.com](http://forbiddenplanet.com). Presented as though you have a brightly lit hologram of the Death Star plans in your living quarters, this light is a great idea and would look at home in the room of any self-respecting Empire supporter.

**ROGUE ONE LIGHT:  
DEATH STAR – £17.99**

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ALL AVAILABLE FROM  
[GRINDSTORE.COM](http://GRINDSTORE.COM)



## Global Warning

The C-word is almost here so, against our better judgment, we decided to headline this issue's Emporium with something snowy, even though snow globes are not specifically an ornament exclusive to this jingly, tinselly, and jolly time of year. That being said, if all potential Christmas gifts were this cool, maybe we wouldn't be too irked by that cut price 20-pack of plain black/white socks that weasel their way under our trees every year. These horror film-themed snow globes from **Gods and Monsters** are the perfect thing to instil a bit of life force into any movie fan this time of year, be it a black Christmas or a silent night, deadly night (we couldn't fit **Eraserhead** into that pun-laden sentence but that's available too - hey, we're only human!).

These globes are brilliantly priced and each awesomely designed, with imagery from all the aforementioned movies. Who would have ever thought back when angry parents were protesting the release of a seasonal slasher for ruining the wholesome image of Santa that a couple of decades later, we would be immortalising that festive horror with a snow globe that could very well be sat on the desk of a high flying executive or (dare we say) the next big writing prodigy, naming no names? The set is bloody great but if we had to pick a favourite, we'd have to say the classy-looking **The Thing**. Nothing says happy Christmas like some stranded researchers in the Antarctic battling malevolent alien life forms and doing blood tests, or is that just our Christmases?

**HORROR SNOW GLOBES (THE THING; ERASERHEAD; LIFEFORCE; SILENT NIGHT, DEADLY NIGHT; BLACK CHRISTMAS)** - £10 EACH

ALL AVAILABLE FROM [GODSANDMONSTERSRECORDS.COM](http://GODSANDMONSTERSRECORDS.COM)

## Drink to the Future

Ever gotten so drunk you'd fail a Voight-Kampff test? Us too (usually around deadline time), which is why we're extremely excited by this space-age offering from [Deck]Hard to Find Whiskey ([www.hftw.com](http://www.hftw.com)). Now we can at least look classy looking out onto a Manchester skyline that is becoming more and more like Ridley Scott's rain-drenched (well we've always had that to be fair), neon-soaked dystopia.

Designed by Cini Boeri in 1973, and still manufactured by the original Italian company, these hand-blown crystal beauties come either clear as day, or as black as Roy Batty's replicant heart. This glassware is so cool it may well prevent you waking with a Tyrell-ble head the morning after a night's libations.

So if you're going to drink Johnny Walker until you see attack ships on fire off the shoulder of Orion, or majestically galloping Unicorns, there's no excuse not to do it in style... (Drink responsibly. Even when on deadline.)

**CIBI DOUBLE BLADE RUNNER GLASS (TWIN PACK) 37CL** - £99.99

**CIBI DOUBLE BLADE RUNNER GLASS BLACK (TWIN PACK) 37CL** - £109.95

AVAILABLE FROM [HTFW.COM](http://HTFW.COM)



## Suitcases of the Highest (First) Order

Kylo Ren, safe to say, has a bit of an anger problem. We're not judging, although we have heard some troubling stories from our stormtrooper contacts. Of all the problems a young wannabe Sith can encounter, one that must be a bit of an extra annoyance is all that travelling. Well, with this fantastic suitcase from [americantourister.co.uk](http://AMERICANTOURISTER.CO.UK), you can save yourself from such unnecessary luggage stress and hold back from going all Ren and slashing the hell out of a fellow passenger's back seat with your cross-bladed lightsaber. This case is superbly designed and vast, and is a luxury case befitting a high-ranking member of the First Order, who always seem to believe that bigger is better (that philosophy didn't work out so good for Starkiller Base, but we digress).

**4-WHEEL MEDIUM SPINNER SUITCASE KYLO REN** - £139.00

AVAILABLE FROM [AMERICANTOURISTER.CO.UK](http://AMERICANTOURISTER.CO.UK)



## STARBURST: EVENT PROFILE



WORDS : JENNIFER DREWETT  
PHOTOS: MCM EXPO

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Once you get through the queues and crowds and into the extensive space MCM hires out, their London convention offered numerous activities, including countless stalls by big and small businesses sell a number of products, stages that host a number of panels and other presentations including the screening of *The Darkest Dawn* on the Sunday morning, booths where you could try out some of the latest games, and promotions for upcoming films. This writer ended up experiencing the *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* mobile virtual reality platform on the Google Daydream. After having a go at casting my own spell with the virtual wand that ended in a ball of virtual flames, I got to have a taste of the virtual world set within the *Harry Potter* universe.

Virtual Reality will inevitably face criticism of the graphics feeling too fake for one to immerse you but this game did a good job in bringing the user into its magical world. The responsiveness is stellar and the potential for further progress is encouraging. VR may have a way to go in terms of graphics but the *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* game is a step in the right direction.

Comics are the original reason why comic cons began many years ago. Whilst it can feel like comic artists can get swamped by all the hubbub of everything else in the event, comic artists and authors were prominent at MCM London Comic Con and able to converse with old and new readers. What struck out were two comic writing teams who were working on series that can make a real impact. The first was a comic from *Deadpool* co-creator Fabian Nicieza called *IBD Unmasked*, a comic series that follows a group of superheroes who deal with two of the most common inflammatory bowel diseases: ulcerative colitis and Crohn's disease. This comic series will be brought to the comic reading community by Marvel Custom Solutions and Takeda Pharmaceuticals and its aim is to shine a light on the physical and emotional difficulties people with IBD face. A unique idea with remarkable talent

behind it, this could be among a new trend of comic books with heroes who have certain ailments that differ from the norm and bring a degree of relief to the real life survivors. Another comic artist trying to be inclusive to an oft-ignored community was Tab Kimpton, the creator of *Discord Comics*. Among other things, Kimpton has been working on a series called **Minority Monsters**, which features a number of characters that are designed to represent the many sexual orientations and gender identities regularly dismissed or misrepresented in popular culture. Some of the characters readers will encounter in the series include Sir Fabulous the Bisexual Unicorn, Captain Sashay the Genderqueer Merperson, and a personal favourite, Reverend Tumbles the Pansexual Satyr. It's refreshing to see a writer represent us in a way that isn't condescending or insulting. Kimpton is running a Kickstarter to fund the **Minority Monsters** further, which is definitely worth checking out.

A growing aspect of the events run by MCM is cosplay. It's something that one will always spot but at MCM London, it was impossible to escape the thousands upon thousands of people dressed as their favourite characters. Whether they were wandering alone or within a group of friends or family, cosplayers were everywhere. The variety of costumes was staggering and impressive. Examples of cosplay sources include *Suicide Squad*, *The Young Ones*, *American Horror Story*, *Hellsing Ultimate*, *Doctor Who*, *The Simpsons*, *Dragonage*, and *Overwatch* to name a few! The effort and time afforded is countless and it appears that MCM London made it worth their time. A number of cosplay competitions were held over the weekend with rather brave cosplayers performing as their character in front of audiences and judges in order to win prizes. A staple of comic cons everywhere, MCM set a standard that many other events aspire to.

Overall, MCM London Comic Con came off as a rich event full of content designed to cater for anyone and the plateau of wonder and possibilities is close to endless.

For more information on upcoming MCM events go to [mcmcomiccon.com](http://mcmcomiccon.com)





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# PAUL MOUNT'S



**This month we're wowed by THE WALKING DEAD and blown away by BLACK MIRROR before reuniting with RED DWARF...**

**The Walking Dead** then, eh? I suppose I could rant and rave about how Robert Kirkman's post-apoc zombie saga has, over the years, veered dizzily from being the best show on television to being the most irritating, irrational and manipulative. Last year's *Dumpster Debacle* was very nearly the last straw, an act of shameless viewer-baiting which almost saw me throw in my zombie towel and walk away from **The Walking Dead** for good. Across six seasons, the show has become just about the biggest scripted series on American television, but it's not always been an easy journey with fans growing restless at the slower-paced rural antics of Season Two, the slightly dithering Governor storylines in Seasons Three and Four and, more recently, in Season Six itself where the show started throwing increasingly lurid mid-season/end-of-season cliff-hangers into

its narrative mix. My blood pressure still skyrockets when I think about dumpsters...

**The Walking Dead** has always exploded back onto our screens when it kicks off a new season but Season Seven – just the one episode old at the time of writing (but too big an episode to be ignored this month) – pretty much went nuclear. Season Six concluded with Rick and his somewhat-less-than-merry band brought to heel (and to their knees) by the charismatic Negan, whose people Rick and co. had been unwisely – and slightly disturbingly – slaughtering earlier in the season in a show of superiority, force, and arrogance that was never going to end well. Previously on **The Walking Dead**, we saw Negan swinging his ugly baseball bat down quite forcefully onto the head of one of Rick's group, but with the shot framed from the victim's POV, we weren't going to find out who it

was until Season Seven commenced last month (and I'm reasonably pleased, if not surprised, that the 'secret' didn't leak during the summer months). Episode One of the new season, *The Day Will Come When You Won't Be* (the title is a call-back to the last episode of Season One) pushed its luck a bit by continuing the tease for a good ten minutes or so – until we finally saw the bat come down with bone-crunching finality on the curiously-bearded Abraham (Michael Cudlitz). It was, for a moment, both a relief and a cop-out that one of the relatively secondary regular characters had 'bought the farm' but then the show pulled off a trick it doesn't do often enough when, after an ill-advised and doomed attack on Negan by Daryl (Norman Reedus), Negan spun round and stoved-in the cranium of poor Glenn Rhee (he of last year's *Dumpster Debacle*). Glenn wasn't the only one who didn't see that coming...

This was, in truth, a grim, disturbing and often quite unpleasant forty-odd minutes of television (especially troubling as I chose to watch it at 8.30am whilst digging into my breakfast bran flakes); but by the same token, it was also quite astonishingly powerful, visceral, and uncompromising. It wasn't just the deaths themselves which were so disquieting – this is, after all, a show about the end of the world and over the years its regular cast death count has been remarkably consistent; the whole episode was tough viewing in other ways as Negan set out to demoralise and utterly destroy the last of Rick's resolve, turning the determined, indefatigable former cop into a quivering wreck by the end of the episode. Rick has been crushed in an episode that, in some places, veered uncomfortably close to 'torture porn'. Difficult, challenging viewing, of course, but let's applaud the brilliance of its production, its taut writing (not always one of the show's strengths) and its commendably focused performances across the board. Especially from Jeffrey Dean Morgan as the already detestable Negan and Andrew Lincoln who, in an episode that gave him maybe half-a-dozen lines of dialogue, showed us a man who has



THE WALKING DEAD



BLACK MIRROR

been beaten into submission, everything he's ever believed in or fought for turned to blood-soaked dust. *The Day Will Come When You Won't Be* was as powerful and affecting an episode of TV as I've ever found myself enduring (I think it would be a bit perverse to call it *enjoyable*) and is surely one of those 'game changer' episodes lesser shows often bang on about before returning their characters to their status quo a few weeks later. I just hope *The Walking Dead* doesn't fumble the ball as this seventh season progresses; they've set themselves an incredibly high bar and whilst there are sure to be dips and troughs, the show has reached a point now where it can't afford to toy with its audience's expectations and affections as it's done in such a cavalier fashion in the recent past. Now *The Walking Dead* has to deliver, and deliver consistently. "We're only just getting started" wasn't just a statement of intent from Negan in this episode, it also seems to be a mission statement for *The Walking Dead* moving forward. Watch this (head) space...

## BLACK MIRROR

**Black Mirror**, Charlie Brooker's slick and searing anthology series, could have suffered abandonment issues when Channel 4 decided not to pursue a third series despite the huge critical acclaim afforded to the first runs in 2011, 2013 and the *White Christmas* 2014 Festive special. Turns out Channel 4 had other fish to fry (or cakes to bake) and threw their financial eggs into another basket, leaving Netflix to take up the slack and rescue *Black Mirror* from TV oblivion. We must be forever grateful to them, because the third series of six episodes (streaming right now – what are you doing sitting there reading this if you haven't watched them yet?) has been intermittently brilliant, the impeccable Brooker often at his best, picking apart our curious obsession with technology and postulating just what could happen if all gets out of control or veers off in

directions we could never have imagined.

I bow down to no one in my admiration for the genius of Charlie Brooker. The three volumes collecting the best of his *Guardian Screen Burn TV* reviews (that he wrote for the newspaper from 2000 to 2010) are required reading for anyone seriously interested in the art of modern television critique, his annual *Screenwipe BBC Two* review of the year is usually the TV highlight of the season to be jolly, and his Sky 1 comedy *A Touch of Cloth* from a few years ago pretty much deconstructed and destroyed the conventions of the British TV police procedural (which made astonishing series finale *Hated by the Nation* a bit of a challenge until its brilliance became apparent). But **Black Mirror** is his masterpiece and Series Three has, with one or two minor exceptions, been no disappointment.

The real genius of Brooker's work for **Black Mirror** (he writes virtually every episode, only this year's *Nosedive* has a

non-Brooker credit, although it's based on his original story) is that he doesn't try to be too clever. He takes a sideways look at the modern world and our over-reliance on technology and then posits a relatively simple scenario in which technology might turn out to be not quite as benevolent and beneficent as we might have hoped. He doesn't try to wind his audience up in knots with labyrinthine plots and look-how-clever-I-am writing; he creates a situation, dumps some characters into it, and then lets the story get on with it. It's a formula that largely works well and which this year has gifted us four mesmerising episodes that suggest Brooker is still at the top of his game and that his creative muse might have been fired to even greater heights thanks to a welcome influx of Netflix cash, which has given many of these new episodes a feature film sheen. *Nosedive* takes place in a near future where being liked and rated on social media is a daily imperative; Bryce Dallas Howard's Lacie Pound becomes increasingly desperate to keep her all-important personal rating high as she makes her way to her vacuous upper class friend's wedding on the other side of the country. Savagely witty and immaculately directed by Joe Wright, *Nosedive* didn't take us anywhere we couldn't see coming but it was one hell of a rich and engaging journey. *Shut Up and Dance*, which saw the show brought right back to its British roots, was a tense edge-of-the-seat thrill ride in which a handful of strangers are manipulated by a sinister presence on the Internet (we never find out who it is) that forces them to obey its commands; failure to do so will result in their darkest personal secrets (and these people have seriously dark secrets) being exposed to the world. Even **Black Mirror** rarely gets grimmer than this. The feature-length finale *Hated by the Nation* also points an accusing finger at the power of social media and the Internet and turns on a barking mad whodunit twist that will leave you gasping at its audacity and originality. Best of all, though, is the episode *San Junipero*, a beautiful and heartfelt story that initially



BLACK MIRROR

presents as a rather unorthodox time travel story before revealing its true colours as a heartbreaking exploration of lost love, lost life, and frustration at 'what might have been' all set against the backdrop of a wonderfully enticing digital afterlife.

Only two episodes of the series haven't quite hit the mark. A good session of Monopoly is still my idea of cutting-edge gaming so *Playtest* and its video game/VR themes left me a bit cold, and *Men Against Fire* never really sprang to life despite some useful action sequences and an interesting dystopian scenario undermined by a clumsy, rather transparent and simplistic 'war-is-bad-and-people-who-look-different-aren't-all-bad' moralising.

Four out of six is a decent enough hit rate for any series, especially an anthology show where it's easy to run aground if the core idea isn't sufficiently compelling. Even a below-par *Black Mirror* is still worth your time because... well, it's Charlie Brooker, innit? Mercifully, there are another six new episodes on the way for 2017 and I'm hoping that now the show has found a new home that truly appreciates it, we'll be looking into the *Black Mirror* for some time to come. Over to you, Mr Brooker...

## RED DWARF

If my memory serves me, *Red Dwarf* began on British TV in 1983 and it's been there ever since. Birthed on BBC Two, where it ran for umpteen seasons, it was finally forced to leave home when its parents lost interest in it and kicked it out. Lads' channel Dave brought the show back from the cold in 2009 for a shonky three-part mini-series which went down so well that two proper full series have since been commissioned and screened, with a third (the show's twelfth) already 'in the can' (that's TV insider speak for 'already filmed') for broadcast next year. *Red Dwarf* may well outlive us all. Certainly, judging from the recently aired six-episode eleventh series, it's in uncommonly rude health. Now written exclusively by series co-creator Doug Naylor (recipient of the Lifetime Achievement award at the

**STARBURST** Film Festival earlier this year – were you there? If not, why not?), *Red Dwarf* has clearly found its second (or possibly third or fourth) wind. Like *Black Mirror*, this was a six-episode series that delivered up four bona fide classic episodes, *Red Dwarf* at its wittiest and cleverest, deftly balancing nippy sci-fi concepts with proper broad character-based comedy; a mix that often eluded the series in its latter years at the Beeb.

*Red Dwarf* is old enough now to no longer have anything to prove and, in all probability, no real desire (or ability) to encourage a new audience to find it. This is a show that is now happily playing to its regular gallery and this year it's done it with style in a run that, after a slightly shaky start, fulfilled the prime remit of any sitcom wherever it happens to be set in that it was genuinely bloody funny. Series opener *Twentica* (last episode filmed for this run, first screened to showcase its impressive visual effects – a real strength of the series generally) was fairly predictable, even pedestrian stuff, as the Boys from the Dwarf found themselves in an alt-America where technology is banned. With more plot than jokes, it was an easy reintroduction to the show's world that allowed later episodes to up the laugh quota and finally restore the show to its often overlooked character comedy roots.

By its third episode, *Red Dwarf XI* was firing on all cylinders as it remembered that its real strength remains its four core characters and their fractured, if not fractious, relationships. Rimmer is still frustrated by his own personality defects and his professional shortcomings, Lister is still a (slightly spruced-up) slob who'd rather have a beer and a curry than explore another abandoned space station, The Cat remains a preening, naive, self-obsessed narcissist, and Kryten... well, he's still Kryten and he gets all the best lines and all the best bits of slapstick business. Standout episodes in this run included *Officer Rimmer*, where Arnold's dream comes true and he finally gets to make everyone else's lives a misery as he fills Red Dwarf with duplicates of himself (courtesy of some very smart gags about 3D printers), *Krysis*, where Kryten

## ALSO SCREENING



### DIRK GENTLY'S HOLISTIC DETECTIVE AGENCY

Previously brought to the screen in a brief 2012 BBC Four series following a successful pilot in 2010, Douglas Adams's unorthodox detective is resurrected by BBC America in a new series starring Samuel Barnett and Elijah Wood.

**Netflix, from December 11th**

**THE MAN IN THE HIGH CASTLE**  
Hotly anticipated second season of the bleak, moody alternative-timeline US drama starring Rufus Sewell.  
**Amazon Prime, from December 16th**

### ELEMENTARY

With the BBC's *Sherlock* returning to UK screens in the New Year like the Second Coming, NBC's somewhat-less-pleased-with-itself take on a modern day Holmes in New York, headlined by Jonny Lee Miller, reaches its fifth season.

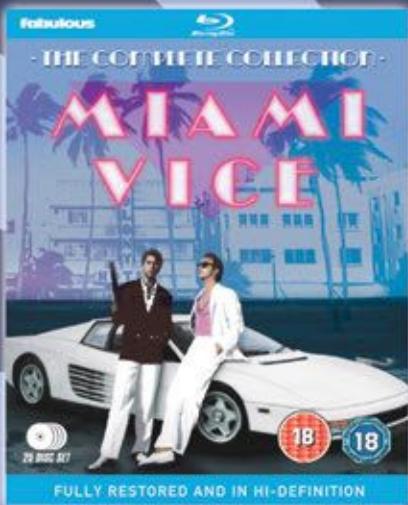
**Sky Living, from December 13th**

starts to feel past his prime, especially when he meets up with pompous super-mech Butler, and series finale *Can of Worms*, which puts Cat in the spotlight for a change. In truth, many of these new episodes traded shamelessly on past *Red Dwarf* glories, but for a show now sailing through its own mid-life crisis and into a cheerful dotage, perhaps that's the very least we can expect and even ask of it. The cast all look a bit saggier and jovial than in the old days, of course (Craig Charles, at 52, is the baby of the bunch) but *Red Dwarf XI*, on the whole, has had a joyous spring in its step and boasted more inspired gags per episode than most latter-day freshman sitcoms. A few stumbles aside – *Officer Rimmer* just seemed to stop as if Naylor had forgotten to write an ending – *Red Dwarf*, a curious survivor of a bygone TV age, is still on good form and it's looking increasingly likely that it's going to be around for a few more years yet. In a wild, frantic and increasingly unpredictable world, there's something oddly reassuring about that... +

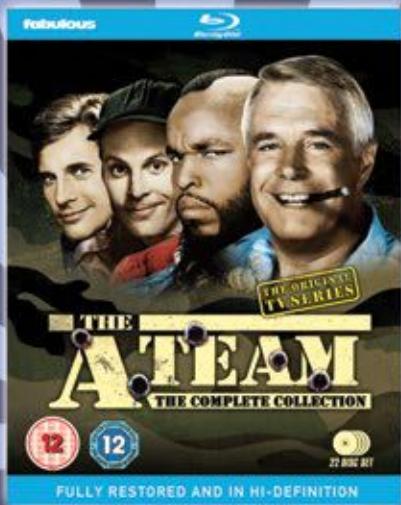
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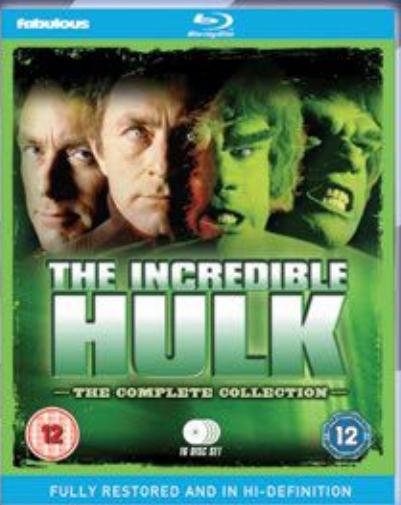
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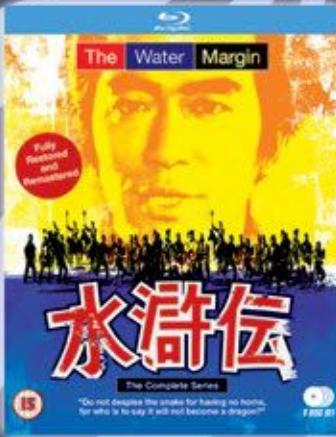
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